

HYDRA Hates Field Trips

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HYDRA Hates Field Trips

by [elliot_edison](#)

Summary

Peter Parker, Spider-Man, new Stark Industries intern. Codename: "The Kid."

After an attempted kidnapping by HYDRA, Peter finds himself under protective house arrest in the Avengers Tower. But as Tony introduces the other Avengers to "The Kid," HYDRA is planning another attempt, this time on the tower itself.

Throw in an ill-timed field trip to Stark Industries by Midtown's decathlon team, an odd habit of taking breakfast foods for a walk, and an overprotective team of Avengers who've fallen in love with the mysterious "Kid," and you get a showdown at the Avengers Tower, a bit of Spidey-whump, and a rescue.

Will Peter be able to keep all his identities secret?

Notes

This was supposed to be a short field-trip fic. I don't know what happened.

Not canon-compliant: Civil War ended happily with a heavily amended version of the accords being signed and everyone being friends again, the Avengers Tower is still in New

York and hosts Stark Industries, JARVIS is still alive, and even though Spider-Man took part in the battle in Berlin none of the Avengers (except Iron Man) know his secret identity. And Infinity War never took place, because I don't even know how to deal with that.

Rated teen for language and non-graphic violence.

The Avengers Are Decent Babysitters

The Avengers Are Decent Babysitters

“Who is this and how did you get this number and why on Earth are you calling me at two in the morning?”

“Is this Tony Stark?” a woman’s voice asks.

“I’ll repeat myself only once. How did you get this number?”

“This is May Parker, Peter’s aunt. He gave me your number in case of emergencies.”

Tony quickly changed his demeanor. “What’s wrong? Is Peter okay?”

“I don’t know. He didn’t come home. He went out patrolling, but we have a deal where he had to be home by midnight on weekends. And he didn’t—he hasn’t come home.” Aunt May hiccuped into the phone. It was obvious she’d been crying. “Can you—”

“On it. I’ll call you once I know more.”

“Thanks, Mr. St—” Aunt May began, but she was cut off by Tony abruptly hanging up on her.

“JARVIS, get me eyes on underoos.” Tony spoke into the ceiling as he whipped out his latest StarkPad, bringing up the alert dashboard for Peter’s vitals. The Spider-Man suit’s AI, Karen, was strangely offline.

“Mr. Parker has just entered the tower lobby. He doesn’t appear to be able to stand. Shall I call an ambulance?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, I’ll go get him. Wake up Bruce and tell him to meet us in MedBay A.”

“Of course, Boss,” JARVIS replied.

Distantly, Tony could hear the loud alarm blaring from Dr. Banner’s room. He raced towards the private elevator, which JARVIS opened automatically for him. As it sped down towards the Avengers Tower’s lobby, Tony tapped his foot impatiently. It was Stark-designed, and one of the fastest elevators in the world, but it still felt too slow.

“JARVIS, make a note to increase elevator speed.”

“The elevator is already at maximum speed possible under current laws of physics,” the AI replied.

“JARVIS, make a note to break the laws of physics and increase elevator speed.”

“Noted.” If AI could roll their eyes, JARVIS would have certainly rolled his.

After a nerve-wracking and improbably short elevator ride, Tony arrived at the lobby. He noticed the limp form of Spider-Man not far from the front door, suit torn and covered in blood, a pool of red forming beneath the teenager’s body. A security guard was rushing towards the teen at the same time as Tony, pulling out a walkie-talkie to call for an ambulance before he was stopped by Tony.

“No ambulance, I’m taking him upstairs.” Tony gathered the boy in his arms bridal-style—even without the Iron Man suit, the scientist could easily support Peter’s petit frame.

“Of course, Mr. Stark. I don’t know how he got in the building, he just—” the guard said, following Tony towards the man’s private elevator. The doors were still open, JARVIS having kept the elevator waiting.

“I’ve got it,” Tony said, striding into the waiting elevator.

The doors shut behind him and the elevator began zooming to the floor with MedBay A, which was located in the Avengers penthouse.

“JARVIS, scan vitals.”

“Pulse elevated but stable. Blood loss levels are concerning but likely non-fatal. Probable concussion. Breath shallow but unobstructed. Multiple visible lacerations. I am unable to take a full-body scan, as it appears that Karen is not functional.”

“Damn. Is Bruce already there?”

“Yes, boss. I’ve informed Dr. Banner that his patient has major blood loss and a probable concussion, and the doctor has set up the MedBay to accommodate Peter.”

“It’s Spider-Man right now,” Tony corrects the AI. Bruce Banner, the mild-mannered scientist behind the incredible Hulk, didn’t know that Spider-Man was just a fifteen-year-old kid from Queens. Neither did the rest of the Avengers, and none of them had met Peter (though, except for Bruce, Thor, and Loki, they’d all fought either with or against Spider-Man in Berlin before both sides came to an agreement over a heavily-amended version of the Sokovia Accords).

“Understood, boss.”

The elevator doors dinged open and Bruce was waiting right outside with a stretcher. Tony laid Peter’s unconscious body on it and they rushed off towards MedBay A.

“Is that Spider-Man?” Bruce asked as he slipped a heart rate monitor onto Peter’s finger. Because the Hulk hadn’t been in Berlin, he’d never met Spider-Man, though he’d heard about the web-slinger from Nat.

“Yes.”

“He’s smaller than I expected.”

“Just help him,” Tony said anxiously, drawing an appraising glance from Bruce. Clearly Tony cared about the hero (or menace, according to the Daily Bugle).

“I can start an IV and blood transfusion, but unless I remove his suit I won’t be able to look at the actual injuries.” Bruce sounded apologetic, knowing that Spider-Man kept his true identity a closely guarded secret.

“JARVIS, cut video and audio recording and black out the windows,” Tony commanded the AI. Looking at Bruce, he added, “Nothing gets out of this room.”

“Scout’s honor,” Bruce mumbled as he grabbed surgical scissors and began cutting through Peter’s suit.

“You were never a boy scout. And be careful—his healing factor and metabolism is on par with Cap’s, so you’ll probably need higher med dosages.”

“He’s a mutant?”

“Mutate,” Tony corrected.

Bruce had finished cutting the Spider-Man suit off of Peter—and both men were relieved that he was wearing boxers underneath. Tony blushed when he noticed they were Iron Man print, though Bruce respectfully said nothing. But when Bruce reached to roll up Peter’s mask, he couldn’t keep silent.

“Christ, Tony, he’s just a kid.”

“Save the lecture. Just help him, Bruce.”

Two hours passed and Peter was stabilized. Bruce had used butterfly closures on the open cuts (“if he’s anything like Cap, the wounds will heal in a few hours and stitches would be overkill”), applied salve and gauze to the burns, and pumped Peter full of saline and nutrients.

“What the hell happened to him?” Bruce asked.

“I don’t know,” Tony said, pacing the MedBay. The inventor hadn’t stopped moving since he’d brought Peter in, worried about the teen. And he was extremely worried—why hadn’t Peter woken up yet?

“Mr. Stark?” Peter let out a quiet groan and opened his eyes. The honey-brown orbs were practically obscured by his dilated pupils.

“Right here, underoos.” Tony rushed to the teen’s side.

“Mr. Stark, I don’t feel so good.”

“Not surprising, given how beaten up you were when you got here,” Bruce said, stepping over to the hospital bed and waving a flashlight in front of the boy’s eyes. “Can you tell me your na—no, wait, can you tell me the date?”

“Oh my glob, you’re Dr. Banner. I just finished your paper on the effects of gamma radiation on second-generation mutants and the increased probability of cancer-cell regeneration. It was awesome,” Peter said, still fuzzy but starstruck.

Bruce chuckled. “Tony, where the hell did you find this kid?”

“Queens—” “Not a kid—” Tony and Peter spoke at the same time.

Peter then realized that he wasn’t wearing his mask. He wasn’t wearing anything at all, other than his boxers. “Oh no,” he said. “Where’s my mask? How many people saw me without—”

“Relax, kid. Just me and Bruce here.”

“Not a kid,” Peter grumbled again, sitting up and looking over his myriad injuries.

“What, would you rather I used your actual name?”

“Wait, no. I don’t want Dr. Banner to—I mean, secret identities are secret for a reason, right?” Peter rambled.

“What would you prefer instead of kid? Underoos?”

“Why can’t you just call me Spider-Man?”

“Can’t do that. You’re supposed to be starting an *actual* Stark Industries internship next week, or did you forget? We can’t have a teenager walking through the labs with a badge that says Spider-Man. And I won’t let you wear the suit the whole time anyway. Not only would it be a potential safety hazard, but your suit’s in rough shape.”

“What?” Peter asked, looking around for the suit. It had been a gift from Tony, and it meant everything to him. If he’d damaged it...

“I had to cut it off to look over your wounds,” Bruce said apologetically, noting that most of them had already scabbed over and were beginning to heal.

“Which brings me to my next point,” Tony said, pointing an accusatory finger at Peter. “What the hell happened? You come into the lobby with a concussion, covered in blood and bruises and cuts and freaking burn marks, and pass out.”

“I...” Peter squinted his eyes and tilted his head as he tried to remember, grimacing as the angle made the lump on the back of his neck pulse.

“Start at the beginning,” Bruce said.

“A very good place to start,” Peter said, allowing himself a small smile as Tony rolled his eyes. “I was going on patrol after dinner, so I kissed my aun—I mean, my roommate—goodbye and swung out the window. There was a bully picking on a middle schooler down an alley, so I dropped down on them and webbed up the bully. I didn’t call the police on him or anything, he was just a kid himself, but I gave him a stern talking to. I actually got a lot of the speech from one of the Captain America PSAs. You know, the one where he—”

“Captain America PSAs?” Tony asked.

“Yeah, you know, the ones they show in schools? Against bullying, or about physical fitness, or ‘your changing bodies,’ that sort of thing. Anyway, I left him webbed up, since I used the weaker web fluid on him and it dissolves in thirty minutes instead of two hours. And then I walked over to Delmar’s and grabbed a sandwich, since, you know, metabolism. I ate it on the roof of the library, when I heard a woman crying, and it turns out her dog had escaped, but don’t worry, I found him. He was a poodle, and—get this—his name was Hulk. How cool is that?”

“Really?” Bruce asked, touched. He wasn’t one of the Avengers with a big fan base.

“Kid, can you get this on track? I don’t need to hear about your runs to the deli and making friends with poodles. How did you end up like this?”

Peter sighed. “There were, like, twenty dudes. They were mugging a woman, but I think it was staged so that I’d show up. They were wearing these dumb bright green jumpsuits with yellow boots and gloves—not exactly inconspicuous colors—and there was this skull octopus thing painted on the back? And they knew my name. My real name, I mean. And that I was Spider-Man. And they kept saying stuff about taking me for testing and healing factors and metabolism and I legit freaked out. I tried to run away but they grabbed me and tazed me—which, by the way, ow. And they tried to put a bag over my head but I started wailing on them, and then they started wailing on me, and then we were all wailing on each other, right? But then there were sirens and cops coming, and they scattered, so I webbed up to the roof and I guess I must have gotten here

somehow?"

"Crap. HYDRA," Tony said.

"HYDRA?" Bruce looked at Peter. Escaping twenty trained HYDRA agents who were sent to kidnap him? The teenager was definitely skilled. "Crap."

"Who's HYDRA?"

"Bad news. Modern-day Nazis. They're like—what's a cultural reference you'd understand?" Tony said.

"I think 'Nazis' is fine," Bruce said.

"What the H-E-double-hockey-sticks, Nazis? So why do they want me? And how do they know my secret identity? And what are they planning on doing to me once they get me?" Peter blurted.

"One question at a time, kid. One, I don't know. Two, I don't know. Three, also I don't know." Tony frowned at Peter. "But until we figure it out, you're staying here. I'll call back the Avengers for protection detail—don't worry, they'll only know you by a codename, so both Spider-Man and your secret identity are safe. Bruce won't say anything. And I'll fill S.H.I.E.L.D. in to start looking for local HYDRA hives."

"But what about school—"

"I'll talk to your... roommate. I need to let her know you're okay anyway. We'll get an excused absence, something about your internship."

"Is she going to be safe?" Peter asked, concerned about Aunt May, alone in their shared apartment in Queens.

"I'll assign a S.H.I.E.L.D. detail to her. She'll be fine. It doesn't sound like they're interested in her anyway."

"Can you send Happy too?" Peter asked, eyes wide and falsely innocent. After all, there was at least one person interested in her.

Tony rolled his eyes, seeing through Peter's thinly veiled attempt at setting his Aunt May up with Tony's chauffeur and bodyguard (and friend) Happy Hogan. "Fine."

"Fine."

"Fine," Bruce said, joining the conversation. "But he needs at least one day more of bedrest. And he probably shouldn't fall asleep for the next 24 hours."

"Well, kid, how do you feel about heading down to the R&D floors to meet some of the other interns followed by a Star Wars marathon?" Tony asked with a smirk.

Tony Takes First Shift

“JARVIS, where are we at with getting the kid an ID badge?”

“Mr. Hogan is on his way up right now with one, boss,” the AI replied.

“Ah, speak of the devil,” Tony said as the elevator arrived and Happy stepped out. “Kid, come over here.”

Peter walked towards Tony, who steered him towards the elevator Happy was waiting outside of. Happy was one of the few people at the Avengers Tower who knew Peter’s true identity—both as Peter Parker, and as Spider-Man. The only others were Tony, Pepper, and now Bruce.

“Here,” Happy said brusquely, thrusting the gold badge at Peter. “Put it on.”

It had his picture and the words ‘The Kid,’ and was attached to a pink Hello Kitty lanyard. Peter was slightly disappointed, as Chococat had always been his favorite Sanrio character. Happy followed Peter’s twitter (to keep an eye on him, as an assignment from Tony), so he should have known that. But Peter shrugged and put the lanyard around his neck.

“You will wear this at all times when you are not sleeping or in the shower. It is indestructible and, from a security perspective, priceless, though it doesn’t do too much without your biometric confirmation anyway. You lose it, you alert JARVIS immediately. Understand?”

“Yes,” Peter said, moving the badge around so he could see the holographic Stark Industries logo flash across its surface. It was surprisingly thick, likely due to the RFID chip inside, but lightweight. “Is this vibranium?”

“Uh huh, sure is, kid,” Happy said, rolling his eyes as if the kid annoyed him. He’d never admit it, but Peter had grown on him over the past few months of knowing the kid as Spider-Man.

“Thanks, Happy!” Peter smiled. He knew Happy had a thing for his Aunt May, since he’d overheard the man discussing the ‘hot Italian woman’ with Tony. Which had been really disturbing to hear at the time, but it was kind of cute now that he thought about it.

“Yeah, thanks. Now don’t you have somewhere to be?” Tony said.

“Yes. At my desk, where I work, doing my actual job instead of playing errand boy to some kid.”

“Well then why are you still here?”

Happy rolled his eyes at Tony’s playfully biting remark and headed back to the elevator, leaving Peter and Tony alone.

“So, quick question, can I put on some actual clothes?” Peter was wearing a thin hospital gown over his boxers. “Not that this look isn’t super fetch, but it’s a bit airy. And, I mean, if you’re actually going to take me to meet some of the other interns, I’m not exactly sure this is the best first impression.”

Tony sighed. “Give me a sec,” he said, walking towards his bedroom.

The pair were on Tony and Pepper’s personal floor, where Peter had been given one of their guest bedrooms. Pepper had already left for an early morning conference call with their Chinese headquarters. Although the Avengers all had their own rooms on other floors of the penthouse, Tony had mentioned that they were all out on various missions for the week.

Tony returned, and thrust a pair of jeans and a t-shirt into the teenager’s waiting arms. He was also

holding a pair of women's UGG boots. "I don't think any of my shoes will fit you, but I'm sure Pepper won't mind if you borrow some of hers. I never realized how many heels she owns, but I'm guessing you'd prefer to stick to flats?"

"Um, Mr. Stark? I don't really think *any* of this is going to fit," Peter said, holding the t-shirt against his small frame. The Black Sabbath shirt was Tony's, and more than several sizes too large for the teenager.

"I'll get you a belt. And I'll ask Happy to order you a wardrobe." Tony drew up his StarkPad and started to send a message to Happy.

"You don't need to do that, Mr. Stark. I can't really afford all new clothes. Can't you just have him run past Aunt May's and grab some things for me?"

"No can do, underoos. Too late anyway, message already sent. And do you really think I'd expect you to pay for it? I'm offended. Besides, I can't have SI's newest intern walking around in the castoffs you call clothes. Now go get dressed so we can get this show on the road. Pepper only gave me one day off of the boring day job stuff—no meetings and no paperwork for once—and I'm planning on making the best of it."

After a minute in his bedroom, Peter returned to the living area. The shirt was comically large, the neckline slipping almost down to his shoulder. The pants were cinched tight with a belt, and the cuffs had been rolled over several times so that he wouldn't trip on them.

Tony grinned at the absurdity of the outfit. "Looking good, kid. Ready to meet some interns?"

"Yes, that would be so totally awesome, Mr. Stark! Oh wait, before we go, what's my cover story? I mean, do I get to tell them my name? Or anything about myself?"

"No. After this HYDRA mess is over and you're just a regular intern, you can tell them your name. But you'll be keeping your... other identity... secret." Tony lead the kid over to the elevator bank, where his private elevator was already open and waiting. "JARVIS, what floor is the main intern lab on again?"

"Floor 40, boss," the AI replied as it whisked them down.

When the elevator dinged open on the intern lab floor, nearly every eye in the place turned to look at Tony and Peter. After all, none of the interns had ever seen the private elevator used and, despite him being their boss, most of them had never even met Tony.

"Is that Tony Stark?" "What the hell is he doing down here?" "Are we in trouble?" "Am I in trouble?" "Who's that boy with him?" "Didn't TMZ publish an article claiming he had a bunch of illegitimate children?" "Is that one of them?" "Didn't he sue TMZ over that?" Peter heard the racing whispers of the interns in the lab.

"Ignore them, kid," Tony said. "Want to go check out some projects?"

"I didn't realize you had so many interns," Peter whispered back. There must have been twenty people in the lab—most college-aged, but several older.

"I think we've got thirty or so? JARVIS, give the kid a rundown on the internship program."

"Sure thing, boss." The ubiquitous AI spoke from the ceiling, and most of the other interns stopped to listen. "Stark Industries accepts high-level candidates who are graduates of major national universities with masters or higher degrees in biology, chemistry, chemical engineering, physics,

mechanical engineering, computer science, and mathematics, with additional scientific disciplines being considered on a per-case basis. The internship program is one of the few fully-paid programs in the nation, and lasts approximately four years. We receive over a thousand applications daily and have ten open slots a year.”

“Whoa. So these are smart people.”

“They’d better be, if they work for me.”

“Yeah, no, of course, Mr. Stark. Can you introduce me to some of them? Or tell me about the projects they’re working on?” Peter looked around excitedly. Some of the interns were still eyeing the pair warily, but most had returned to working, even if only to make themselves look busy and productive in front of the company’s owner.

“I don’t actually know any of them,” Tony admitted sheepishly. “I’m not involved much in the internship program, so I don’t know what they’re working on.”

“But you hired me.”

“Yeah, well. Pretty sure you’re also not a college graduate yet either.”

“Then why—”

“Kid, someday you *are* going to be a college graduate. And you are going to take this world by storm. And I kinda wanted to get my hooks into you before Oscorp or Hammer Industries could snatch you up. And that’s just based on your brain, I’m not even going to get started on your nocturnal extracurriculars. Capisce? Whoa, kid, chill out, you don’t want to cry in front of your new coworkers before you’ve even met them, right?” Peter nodded and took a deep breath. Tony shouted across the room, “Oy, any of you want to give me and the new intern a tour?”

A few hands went up. Tony pointed at four of the interns in order (“you, you, you, and you”), and they all rushed over.

“Well, I’m Tony Stark, but you probably already knew that, and this is the kid. Quick, names and one fun fact about you. Go.”

The interns all blurred out the requested information rapid-fire style. “Um, Phillip Grant. I can cook minute rice in 58 seconds?” “Lee Clayton. I’m the youngest of 14 siblings.” “Sarah Jennings, former paralympic cross-skier.” “Marcy Pearson. I also run the Stark internship program’s official Twitter.”

“Great. Now can you show us around the lab and let us see what you’re working on?”

“Right, so we know who you are, Dr. Stark,” Marcy said, stressing the word doctor, since she knew people usually forgot about Tony’s doctorate when addressing him. “But who are you, um, young man?”

Peter opened his mouth to speak, but Tony clapped a hand over it. “Don’t answer that, kid. He’s the newest intern. Well, obviously he doesn’t work here yet.”

Marcy chuckled, “Yes, he’s a bit young for that.”

“He starts on Monday,” Tony said, cocking an eyebrow at her as if to challenge her to say something. Marcy, to her credit, kept silent and just nodded.

“So what’s your name?” Lee asked.

“Don’t answer that either, kid,” Tony said.

“I wasn’t going to. Geez, Mr. Stark, I’m not a child.” Peter rolled his eyes and turned to the other interns, smiling hesitantly. “Don’t mind grumpy cat over there,” he said, motioning at Tony with his chin. “You can call me ‘The Kid,’ or just kid, or ‘hey you,’ or ‘nerd.’ I’m not super picky. I hadn’t really been expecting for my name to be classified when I started here, but what can you do?” He shrugged.

“Kid, shut up. Seriously, if you keep talking, eventually you’re going to blab your whole life story anyway, and then where would all these precautions go? JARVIS, take a note to create additional guardrails to make up for the kid’s big mouth.”

“Noted, boss,” the AI said.

“Now, Marcy, was it? I’m counting on you to make sure no pictures of the kid as an intern make it onto social media, and that no mention of a new intern is made on Twitter,” Tony said. She nodded, and he continued. “Now show us what you’ve all been working on.”

After seeing the other interns’ projects (a PR algorithm to stop negative press about SI from Marcy, cleaner firewalls for the internal network from Phillip, and a plant-based energy source from Lee and Sarah), Tony decided to treat the four interns to lunch with Peter and him, and took them down to the cafeteria in his private elevator.

By the end of the day, Peter was on the fast track to becoming friends with all four interns, even though they were much older and more accomplished than him. But the others had discovered that not only was Peter incredibly bright, but he also was able to provide them with help on their projects by asking the right questions or making gentle suggestions, in a way that brought absolutely no ego into the conversation. In short, they all looked forward to working with him more, even though they’d been told he’d probably be assigned to a different lab than the one the interns all worked in.

“That was awesome, but Mr. Stark is starting to make that face where he’s getting tired but doesn’t want anyone to know, so I think we’d better get going,” Peter whispered apologetically to the other interns.

“Why does that mean you have to go?” Lee asked.

“Um, confidential? I’m pretty sure that’s one of the things I’m not at liberty to discuss with you. Which is kind of why Mr. Stark’s following me around today anyway, to make sure I don’t say anything I’m not supposed to. Which is nuts, right? I mean, what if I knew something ridiculously important, like the proven fact that Tony Stark was actually replaced by a lizard person in Afghanistan and, like, the company just never noticed because, well, duh he was a little different when he came back. But maybe like Pepper Potts figured it out, but she’s cool with it because she likes lizard-Tony better? And then—”

“Jesus Christ, kid,” Tony said, having snuck up behind Peter. “No, I am not a lizard person.”

“Prove it, then,” Sarah said.

“You do realize I’m your boss, right?” Tony cocked an eyebrow and looked at the young woman reproachfully. She blanched and swallowed visibly.

Peter playfully smacked Tony in the chest. “Don’t be an ass, Mr. Stark.”

“I’m your boss too, kid. Don’t forget who cuts your checks.”

“Wait, you’re actually going to pay me? I figured you were joking about that. And we better be talking human money and not lizard person money, because I don’t know what the exchange rate is or even where I could get it exchanged. I mean, I realize you pay the other interns because they’re like functioning adults and whatnot, but I’m—”

“Cutting you off there, kid. Interns, it was a pleasure to meet you, you’re the future of my company, keep up the good work, yada yada yada. Say goodbye, kid.”

“I’ll see you guys soon! Monday for sure, but maybe I can swing by before just to say hi?” Peter looked at his new friends hopefully. They smiled back, still weirded out by the entire nameless situation (and by how young the kid seemed), but for the most part he’d already won them over.

Tony put a hand on Peter’s lower back and guided the teenager towards the private elevator. It opened, and began its way up to the penthouse.

“Takeout Chinese and Star Wars?” Tony asked.

“Duh. Skip the prequels?”

“Obviously.”

“You gonna do that old-man thing where you pretend you’re just resting your eyes but you totally end up napping and lying about it?”

“Shut up, brat.”

“Was that a yes? JARVIS, was that a yes?” Peter asked the ceiling before Tony clamped a hand on the teen’s mouth.

“JARVIS, don’t answer that.”

The Babysitters’ Club

“Why are we here?” Natasha Romanov asked. The Black Widow was scratching her initials into the conference room’s wooden table with a switchblade.

“That is mahogany!” Clint Barton shouted at her dramatically. Natasha just rolled her eyes. Of course Hawkeye loved the Hunger Games, being an archer and all.

‘*Screw you,*’ she signed to Clint.

‘*You wish,*’ he signed back, grinning.

“Good morning,” Steve Rogers said as he entered the room. Behind Captain America was Bucky Barnes, the Winter Soldier.

“Ngh,” Bruce grumbled into his coffee. The scientist was not a morning person, and was ticked off at Tony for calling a 6 A.M. Avengers team meeting.

“We’re just waiting on Thor and Loki, then we can get started,” Pepper Potts strode into the board

room, Tony close behind her.

“What’s this about?” Natasha asked.

“Patience, Nat. And seriously? What the hell have you done to my table?” Tony said.

“I was bored,” she said, shrugging.

“Friends,” a booming voice from the hall rang. “Many thanks for waiting on my brother and I. We apologize for taking so long, but the trek from Asgard is long and—”

“Thor apologizes,” Loki sneered as they entered the room. “I do not.”

“Sit,” Pepper commanded in the no-nonsense voice all the Avengers had come to respect and obey without thinking. Once all of them were seated at the conference table, she handed out a dossier to each member, including Tony.

“What’s this?” Natasha said, opening the file. “It’s just a picture of a kid and the words ‘The Kid’ next to it.”

When it had come to picking a code name for Peter, Tony had ultimately offered only two choices: underoos, or ‘The Kid.’ Peter had (unsurprisingly) picked the latter.

“That would be the tower’s newest, and hopefully *temporary*, resident. His identity is strictly classified, but what you can know is this: HYDRA has targeted him for kidnapping. If they get their hands on him, it would not only result in incredibly painful torture for the kid. Once they’re done with him, they’ll kill him. And what they get out of him as a result of torture could be enough to allow them to rise to power,” Tony said.

“Shit,” Clint said. “He’s just a child. What is he, like, 12?”

“Language,” Steve chastised.

“So what does he know that’s so important?” Natasha asked.

“Is he a spy?” Clint added. “An assassin? HYDRA agent gone rogue? No, wait, he’s a kid. Son of someone important?”

“The child must be an impressive fighter, if the Greek sea serpent has come to fetch him,” Thor said.

“No, not hydra the mythological creature, HYDRA the—Steve, you want to explain?” Tony said.

Steve nodded, thinning his mouth as he looked at the tensed Bucky. “HYDRA is a team of bad guys. Villains. Modern-day Nazis. They have the potential to destroy the world order, and bring nations to their knees.”

“And are they hiring?” Loki asked.

“No,” Tony said. “Loki, you try anything and we are throwing you back in the box, understood? As far as why HYDRA is after the kid, that’s confidential and doesn’t concern you. But I will promise you, as dangerous as the kid is—and, trust me, he is dangerous—he does not currently pose a risk to you.” Tony leaned back in his chair. “Questions?”

“Seriously, Tony, why are we here?” Natasha repeated herself.

“Until we can find the HYDRA agents after the kid, he needs round-the-clock protection. He’s confined to the tower, though he does have access to most of the floors.”

“And how dangerous is this child?” Thor asked.

“Two nights ago, HYDRA sent a team of twenty assassins after the kid,” Bruce said. “He managed to single-handedly take out a good number of them before slipping away. He can fight, but he can also maneuver quickly in the field. He’s also smart—like, smarter than me. Probably smarter than Tony.”

“Wait, seriously?” Steve said, looking at Tony.

“Yep,” the inventor replied. “And probably more physically dangerous than I am, too. We’ve got a preliminary protection detail schedule sent to the calendars on your StarkPhones, but I need you alert.”

At that moment, as all the Avengers (minus Tony and Bruce) were considering how dangerous the kid had to be, Peter strolled into the board room, having gotten lost in the penthouse. He was wearing an oversized ‘I survived New York’ t-shirt and fuzzy pink Hello Kitty pajama pants, no shoes, with a Hello Kitty lanyard and Avengers Tower ID badge around his neck. The badge was gold and bare except for his picture and the words ‘The Kid.’ In Peter’s hands was a half-empty bowl of Lucky Charms, and his mouth was full of marshmallows.

He squeaked at seeing all the Avengers and dropped the bowl. Cereal and milk splashed across the marble floor. For some reason, he raised his hands to cover his nipples, as if that would provide some sort of protection from the team’s penetrating stares. At Tony’s snort, he realized that most of them were staring at the Hello Kitty pajama pants, and dropped his hands to cover his crotch. As if that would somehow make them not notice the ridiculous pattern.

“This is the kid?” Clint asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Whoa, Hawkeye, huge fan,” Peter attempted to say. Of course, his mouth was still full of cereal so it came out more like ‘whu, hukuy, ughe fuhn.’

“Swallow, kid,” Tony sighed.

Peter did. “Sorry, Mr. Stark.”

“Yes, this is the kid. What the heck are you doing down here?”

“I was taking my cereal for a walk, like you do, and then I got lost. So I just decided to keep walking and exploring—you said it was totally cool if I checked the place out—and there was this one really cool hallway with portraits? Like, there were these ridiculous oil paintings of all of the Avengers, and I kept going down the hall and somehow wound up here? Ooh, Dr. Banner, is that coffee? Can I have some?” Peter asked, making grabby hands as Bruce hesitantly handed over his mug.

“Do Earth children frequently take their breakfast meals for a walk?” Thor asked, confused.

“No,” Steve said, looking at Peter. He squinted, puzzled. “Your accent—Queens?”

“Yeah! Oh wait, I mean—frick frack. Mr. Stark, was that supposed to be confidential? Did I screw up already? Hey, have you ever seen this really old movie ‘Men in Black’? Do you have something like a memory eraser where we can just pretend I never said that?”

“Just... try to think before opening your mouth next time?” Tony rubbed his head, trying to stave off the impending migraine. Maybe he should have assigned S.H.I.E.L.D. agents to guard Peter; at least they never asked questions.

“Sorry Mr. Stark. But Mr. Captain Rogers, sir, yeah!”

“Brooklyn, kid. Always nice to meet a fellow *real* New Yorker.” Peter nearly swooned.

“Hey kid. You want to get out of here and let the grownups finish talking? Go put on some clothes; I had Happy pick up a full wardrobe for you. It should already be in the closet in your room.” Tony made a shooing motion at Peter.

“Yeah, okay. Bye, Avengers. It was awesome meeting you. Oh my glob I can’t believe I met the Avengers. I’m super excited to hang out with you this week while S.H.I.E.L.D. hunts down those HYDRA dudes.” Peter gave an awkward wave and stepped over to the shattered cereal bowl near the door. Looking at his hands and at the ceramic shards, he just kept backing out of the room.

“I’m gonna leave that for someone who doesn’t have human hands. Or, you know, has a broom or mop or something. Actually, I’m just gonna shut up now.” Peter fled the board room.

“I accept mission to protect asset ‘The Kid.’” Bucky spoke for the first time the entire meeting, his slight remaining Russian accent acidic in the air. “I will protect his life with my own.”

“Agreed, my hirsute assassin friend,” Thor said, beaming at Bucky. “And this child is indeed quite dangerous. Look how well he was able to disarm us using only his words. Quite cunning.”

“Yeah, okay, let’s go with that,” Tony said, sighing. “Now, I’ve been up with the kid for most of the past 24 hours, and contrary to popular belief I do need to sleep sometimes. Hey Pepper, who’s up first?”

“Bruce. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have an actual meeting with some overseas investors.” The powerful Stark Industries CEO strode out of the room, beige pumps clicking across the marble.

“Awesome,” Bruce said, thumping his forehead on the table. “And the kid finished my coffee.”

Bruce Banner, Science Bro

“So, kid,” Bruce said as they awkwardly met up in the kitchen. “What’s the plan?”

Peter was busy texting on the encrypted StarkPhone Tony had provided him with and didn’t hear.

[TheKid]

Hey, guy in the chair, this is a temporary number while I’m under house arrest at an undisclosed location :(((

Oh and don’t use my real name, I’m kind of undercover?

You can call me kid, Tony’s idea

[ChairGuy]

Tony? As in Tony Stark, Iron Man? AHHHHHHHHWHAT

Have you met any of the other Avengers?

Wait, how do I know this is really you and not some evil dude pretending to be you?

[TheKid]

Um

You watch the Star Wars Holiday Special every year at Christmas and you cry when Chewie is reunited with his family

[ChairGuy]

Holy crap it is you

And I thought we agreed to never speak of that

Wait, house arrest?

[TheKid]

Long story

Don't know when I'll get out of here

I've got an excuse lined up for school, but can you take notes for me?

[ChairGuy]

Duh

[TheKid]

That's why you're my number 1 guy in the chair

Crud I gotta go, Dr. Banner (AHHHHH) is trying to talk to me

[ChairGuy]

AHHHHHHHHHHHH XD XD XD

“Kid?” Bruce repeated.

“Sorry, Dr. Banner. I was just making sure Ne—um, my guy-in-the-chair knew where I was.”

“What am I supposed to do with you?”

“Ooh, can you take me on a tour of the building? I wandered around the penthouse a bit when Mr. Stark took a short nap—I don't really need to sleep much since the... you know.” Peter looked around before miming shooting webs from his wrists, complete with whooshing sounds from his mouth. “I crash hardcore maybe once a week, but otherwise only need an hour or two a night. So I was wandering around. But I didn't really get to see much because I kept getting lost. Tony showed me the intern labs and cafeteria, but not much else.”

“I'll be honest, kid, I don't really get out much. Just up here, and my lab, and sometimes the coffee cart in the lobby.”

“Perfect! I could totally use some coffee. And would it be cool if I saw your lab? I promise not to touch anything. Heck, last time I touched something in a geneticist's lab, well.” He mimed the web shooters again. “Definitely not going to make that mistake again.”

Bruce sighed. It was true that he could use some caffeine as well, since it was seven in the morning, he wasn't a morning person, and someone (the kid) had stolen his coffee earlier. Besides, he did have work to do in the lab anyway.

“Fine.”

“Awesome. Oh this is so awesome. I am the awesomest.” Peter pumped his fist as they headed towards the private elevators. “Do they have food too? I'm starving.”

“Didn't you just eat breakfast?”

Peter shrugged. "Metabolism. I usually need to pack in thirty or forty thousand calories a day. More if I'm doing the, you know." Peter began to move his hands to mime the web shooters again when Bruce made a motion to stop.

"I think I get it, kid."

"Cool. Cool cool cool. So, food?"

"Yeah, fine."

The elevator dinged and the doors opened onto a mezzanine floor in the multi-story lobby. While they waited in line, Peter bounced on his heels, looking around. There were many conversations going on, with scientists and business people alike arriving for work, going through the scanners, and grabbing coffee as well.

"Hey, Dr. Banner, can I ask you a question?" Peter didn't wait for a response. "What does the badge mean? Like, yours is different than mine? What does the silver stand for? And why do you get a title of 'Geneticist' while I don't get a title? But oh boy you look rough in that picture. Where did they get it from? I think they pulled mine from the State Department, since it looks like it's my passport photo."

"Silver means I have nearly unlimited access to the tower and labs. The picture... I think it was after some kind of fight right after I'd shifted back from the green guy, and I was really out of it. Tony took the picture to be a dick, which is also probably why it's my ID photo."

"Then why's mine gold? And why don't I get a title?"

"Kid, what the heck would your title even be? You don't even get a real name. And gold means... huh, I hadn't noticed. What the hell was Tony thinking?" Bruce mumbled to himself. "Gold is all-access. Only Tony has that clearance. Or had, I guess. Not like you'd know, since he appears to be the only person allowed to walk around the higher floors without a badge around his neck."

"Oh." Peter looked down at his badge. "Huh. I don't know, I just guess I wished it said intern or something like all the other interns I met yesterday. But maybe Mr. Stark's still working on my official title or something?" He squinted down at his badge on its Hello Kitty lanyard and shrugged.

Peter opened his mouth to ask more questions, but Bruce was saved by them reaching the front of the line. The geneticist ordered a double red-eye, while Peter went for the largest iced caramel latte they had with five extra pumps of sugar and three shots of espresso, as well as three muffins, two bananas, and a chocolate chip cookie. Bruce shuddered to think of what the kid would be like hopped up on that much caffeine and sugar. After swiping his badge to pay for the order (which would be charged to Tony's account as long as Bruce was the Avenger on protection duty), Bruce lead Peter to the regular elevators and, swiping his badge again, pressed the button for the 87th floor.

The elevator was packed, and the employees kept stealing looks at Peter, trying to figure out why there was a kid in there with them. By the time the elevator reached the 87th floor, it was empty other than the pair of heroes. Bruce lead Peter down a long hallway, stopping at a glass-walled lab.

"Home sweet home," he sighed, shrugging off his cardigan and replacing it with a worn lab coat.

"Whoa," Peter said, setting the bag of food down on the counter in the kitchenette and looking around in awe. "So this is where the magic happens? Too cool. Hey, is that giant thing a

centrifuge? Flipping awesome, what's the capacity of it? Oh wait, is that a giant vacuum chamber? What's the coolest thing you've ever put in there? And what happened?"

Peter looked expectantly at Bruce, as if he expected the man to actually answer all those questions.

"Um, what? Listen, kid, I actually need to—"

"Can I help?" Peter grabbed one of the muffins and shoved the entire thing in his mouth, smiling around the crumbs. "I'm really good with chemistry." Of course, his mouth was full, so it sounded more like 'Thng illy guuh wih chengstry.'

"Swallow, kid. Yeah, I guess so?" Bruce closed his eyes and counted backwards from ten. He wasn't angry, and there wasn't a chance of the green guy showing up, but he definitely was overwhelmed by the energetic teenager.

Peter swallowed and took a large drink of his iced latte, slurping through the straw. "Sorry, Dr. Banner. What are you working on?"

Bruce waited a second, expecting the teenager to follow up with thirty more questions that he couldn't keep track of, but it seemed like Peter actually wanted a response this time.

"Using a combination of Vita-rays and gamma radiation on silicon-carbide vibranium alloys injected into the bloodstream, and seeing how they react once they reach the brain and we generate an electrical pulse on the amygdala."

"Neat. So it's building off of your, um, own transformation? Are you figuring that the alloys will adhere themselves to neurostem cells and that the electric pulse will vibrate them? Are you trying to figure out the vibration frequency? You know, this could totally be used to reduce migraines that are neurologically based. Oh wait no, you could use it to mitigate electric pulses caused by potential epileptic seizures and stop them before they happen! That is so cool."

Bruce was stunned. He'd thought of the treatment for migraines, but he hadn't considered the application to seizures. This kid was too smart.

"Yeah."

"So how can I help?"

Over several hours, Peter helped Bruce with his research, preparing samples and slides. Around noon they ordered lunch to be delivered to the lab—four large pizzas (three Hawaiian, which Peter demolished all by himself). By five, Bruce was exhausted by all of the questions Peter had, but also impressed. The teen had been a great help in the lab, including coming up with unique solutions for several issues Bruce hadn't been able to overcome yet.

"Alright, kid. Quitting time."

"Already?"

"We've been here for ten hours, and I'm tired. Yes, already. Come on, let's go." Bruce shrugged off his lab coat and the pair headed for the elevators, going back up to the Avengers' penthouse. Since Peter was going to remain in the penthouse for the rest of the night, he wouldn't require a dedicated Avenger protector, but would instead be looked after by JARVIS and by Tony himself.

The Murder Twins Are Not Actually Twins

"Hey JARVIS, who's babysitting today?" Peter asked the ceiling as he poured a third bowl of cereal. The previous two bowls he'd eaten while strolling around the penthouse, trying to figure out where JARVIS had cameras planted.

"Ms. Romanov and Mr. Barton are sharing protection detail," the AI said.

"Neat." Peter sat at the table and whipped out his StarkPhone to send a text to Ned, who was probably in homeroom at the moment.

[TheKid]

What's up? Miss you and MJ

I'm already going stir crazy up in here

[ChairGuy]

Dude

Duuuuuuuuude

How long are you going to be there

You're going to miss the field trip they just announced

Because we won the decathlon thing they're taking the team

Duuuuude

[TheKid]

When?

[ChairGuy]

Firday

*Friday

And it's going to be totally sweet XD

[TheKid]

Ugh, spare me the details, I don't want to know what I'm missing

Blarggh :'(()

[ChairGuy]

Copy that

Sorry kid

Peter's spidey-sense alerted him to rustling in the vents above him, and he took a large step to the right before Clint dropped down, having intended to tackle the kid to the ground.

"Are you trying to get me to break all of the bowls in this place?" Peter cocked an eyebrow at the archer.

"More like he's trying to figure out how dangerous you are. Good reflexes, kid." Natasha walked into the kitchen.

"Whoa, um, thanks Miss Black Widow sir. I mean ma'am." Peter shoveled another spoonful of Lucky Charms into his mouth. "Please don't kill me," he said. Of course, with his mouth full, it sounded more like 'hlee dunt kih ne.'

"Swallow, kid," Clint said, smirking. "Can't read your lips when your mouth's full."

Peter did. "Sorry, Mr. Hawkeye, sir."

'*Did the kid seriously just ask us not to kill him?*' Natasha signed.

Clint sighed. "We're not going to kill you, kid. First, it'd seriously piss Tony off. Not worth it. And second, we generally don't go around killing kids. We're Avengers, numbskull."

"Oh. If you're not going to kill me, then can you teach me sign language?"

"*что не так с этим ребенком?*" [*What is wrong with this kid?*] Natasha asked Clint.

Clint shrugged. Peter gaped, impressed that Clint was able to read lips in Russian as well. While the Deaf Avenger's hearing aids let him pick up most sounds, he still relied on lips and context to some extent.

"Whoa, can you teach me Russian too? That is so cool. How many other languages do the two of you know? And did you know that some people call you the Murder Twins? And there's an online conspiracy that you two are actually twins, separated at birth, who were contracted to kill each other, but then realized you were related and went rogue? But there's also a conspiracy that you're together—like, *together* together. And some people also think you are twins but also together, but that's gross and totally not true, right?"

Natasha ignored that question. "You any good at languages?"

Turns out Peter was a natural at languages, a side effect of his increased sensory abilities. Within a few hours, he had basics down in both Russian and sign language.

'*Can we get lunch? Anything but pizza,*' Peter signed.

'*Sure,*' Clint signed back. '*Burgers?*'

Peter nodded happily. After watching the teen choke down four hamburgers, two orders of fries, and a large chocolate milkshake, trying to talk with his mouth full almost the entire time, Clint and Natasha decided to take Peter to the Avengers' training room two floors down.

"You got any athletic clothing you can put on before we head down to the gym?" Clint asked.

The first thing to flash through Peter's mind was the Spider-Man suit. Then he remembered that the suit was destroyed. And then he remembered that the Avengers didn't know he was Spider-Man anyway.

"I don't think so? Happy is the one who got me clothes, and they're pretty much what Mr. Stark wears just in smaller sizes." Peter gestured unhappily at the dark dad jeans and AC/DC shirt he was wearing. The closet was full of nothing but old band shirts and flashy three-piece suits.

Natasha rolled her eyes. "Happy Hogan wouldn't know what to do with a kid if it bit him in the ass." She looked at the teen, considering. "I think I have some yoga pants that would fit you. Come on."

When Peter came out of his room wearing the yoga pants, Clint couldn't stop himself from snorting. Even Natasha was fighting a smile. The pants were incredibly tight, showcasing Peter's powerful thighs and calves. The fabric was a shiny metallic rainbow, with the words 'I put the ASS in ASSASSIN' printed across the butt. Clint had gotten them for her as a joke, and they'd never been worn. Until now

“Whatever, you know I look good.” Peter turned and sashayed towards the elevator, not checking to see whether the assassins were following him.

They were, of course, and the three of them quickly found themselves in a large gymnasium. Obstacle courses littered the room, racks of weights to one side, a running track around the edges, and a large mat for sparring in the middle.

“This is too awesome,” Peter said, looking around. The fluorescent lights were a little too bright, and he could hear their humming in the back of his skull, but he was too excited to really care. “Oh my glob, I need to take a selfie to send to Ne—um, my friend. Oh wait, I’m supposed to be in hiding undercover. Craptastic. Can I take a picture of you two?”

“How about I take a picture of you and Nat from behind, with your heads cut off? You can still send it to your friend, but there won’t be any identifying information. Sound good?”

“Heck yes! Mr. Hawkeye, you are the greatest!”

Peter and Natasha went to stand in front of one of the obstacles as Clint counted down: 3, 2, 1. The StarkPhone’s camera went off.

“Let me see,” Peter said, dashing toward the archer and grabbing the phone from his hands.

His face fell, and Clint started laughing, bending over and clutching his stomach. Peter had forgotten about the pants. But neither Clint nor Natasha had forgotten, obviously. Peter hadn’t noticed that, while Clint was counting down, Natasha had turned around to face the camera, crouched down, and pointed a finger at Peter’s butt while frowning. Natasha pulled the phone out of the teenager’s hand to see the picture and cracked her first real smile of the day.

“Looking good, kid,” she said.

“The two of you are such jerks,” Peter pouted, grabbing back the phone. “Whatever, I’m still going to send it to him.”

[TheKid]

Hanging out with the Black Widow today WHAAAAAAT XD XD

[ChairGuy]

Ugh is she taking a picture with your butt?

I wish she was taking a picture with my butt :’((((

[TheKid]

WTF dude you’re so weird

[ChairGuy]

Hey before I forget there’s a quiz next week in Spanish if you’re back by then

And watch out, Flash has been a complete jerk about you being MIA

I kinda let it slip that you’d been given a Stark internship a few days ago

Sorry bro. I know it wasn’t confidential info or anything but I should have asked first

But he’s going around telling everyone you’re lying about it for attention

[TheKid]

And people are listening? :(

[ChairGuy]

Naw, MJ and I are laying the smack down. We got your back, fam

[TheKid]

You complete me

Peter stopped smiling at his phone to see Natasha and Clint looking at him strangely. He blushed and put the phone on a nearby bench.

“So what’s the plan? Can I see you guys fight?” Peter asked eagerly.

“Only if you earn it,” Natasha said. She unexpectedly threw a roundhouse kick, aimed straight at Peter’s head.

He let out a high-pitched shriek, but caught her ankle before it could connect with his face. His grip was strong enough to completely stop her momentum. She stood there, impressed, balanced on one foot, her other leg still raised high in the air.

“Whoa,” Clint said.

“I mean, what? I didn’t, um—why exactly did you—I thought we were friends. I was gonna call us “the murder triplets” and everything. Oh no, are you guys working for HYDRA? Oh no oh no oh no this is bad this is so bad. I need to call Mr. Stark. JARVIS,” Peter shouted towards the ceiling before Natasha clapped a hand over his mouth.

“Ignore the kid, JARVIS. Just a minor misunderstanding,” she shouted, looking at Peter with a glare. “I was just checking your reflexes, but damn. You got some muscles under there, don’t you. Where’d you get those?”

“That information is confidential,” JARVIS alerted from the ceiling.

“What?” Peter looked up at the ceiling in confusion, as if that’s where the AI lived.

“After the Queens debacle, boss asked me to interrupt any line of questioning that could potentially reveal personal information about the kid.”

“Wait, JARVIS,” Natasha said. “Do you know who the kid is?”

“Yes.”

“And do you—”

“I am not going to answer any more of your questions, Ms. Romanov. Kid, if you need any assistance, I will answer you. Clint—I haven’t decided yet.”

“Gee, thanks,” Clint said, rolling his eyes.

“So, now can I watch you two spar?” Peter asked hopefully.

After a short fight between the two assassins (Natasha winning two out of three rounds), the trio moved to the obstacle courses. For thirty minutes, they jumped around, spun, and rolled, with Peter yelling “Parkour” every time he did a cool-looking move. By the end of the half-hour, both Natasha and Clint were covered in sweat and breathing heavily, though Peter was still fresh-faced.

“Call it a day?” he asked, taking note of their tired appearances.

“Yeah, I think Tony’s expecting you in the penthouse for dinner anyway,” Clint said. “Not like you care since there’s no way you can be hungry after that lun—”

“Sweet, I’m starving. Let’s go.”

Super Soldier with a Side of Steve

Peter moved the twelfth pancake onto the plate and turned off the stove. He’d learned early on how to make several staple foods, as Aunt May couldn’t even make a bowl of cereal without somehow burning it. He grabbed maple syrup from the fridge and walked towards the table, surprised to see Captain America and the Winter Soldier already waiting for him.

“Hey, kid,” Steve said, his deep voice rumbling through his chest in a patriotic way. “That’s mighty kind of you, but you didn’t need to make us breakfast.”

“Oh hey Mr. Captain America, sir. Sorry, did you want me to make you some too? I already turned off the stove but it wouldn’t take too long—”

Bucky waved his hand to silence the kid. Peter dropped the plate on the table (luckily, it didn’t break, and all the pancakes stayed on) as he took in Bucky’s metal arm.

“Whoa, can I—” Peter hovered his hands over the forearm, asking for permission to touch. Bucky narrowed his eyes.

“It’s nothing personal,” Steve said. “Bucky doesn’t allow anyone to—”

“Yes,” Bucky interrupted. “You may touch.”

As a flabbergasted Steve looked at his long-time friend, Peter eagerly laid a tentative finger on the metal arm.

“Can you feel that? How much feeling does the arm have? Does it hurt? Can it hurt?” Peter grabbed Bucky’s wrist to turn the arm over. “What’s the range of motion like? Can you feel a difference in motion between your arms? Were you right handed or left handed before you lost your bio-arm? Who made the arm? It’s super cool.” Peter looked up at Bucky, whose eyes were wide. The Winter Soldier looked overwhelmed; usually people ignored him or avoided him out of fear, but this kid was willingly touching him—not even Steve went that far.

“My first arm was made by HYDRA when I… worked for them. This arm is made by Stark after he… destroyed the other one.”

“Neat,” Peter said blankly, rotating the arm to test the shoulder joint. “Hey, do you want to go down to a lab and see if I can increase your radial range?”

Bucky looked at Steve in a panic.

“That sounds like a great idea, kid,” Steve said. That would solve two problems he had—one, he needed to sneak off to his side gig creating school PSAs that he didn’t want any of the Avengers to know about. And two—he’d never seen Bucky as comfortable with another person as he was with the kid. It would be a good experience for Bucky to spend time one-on-one with someone who wasn’t Steve.

“Awesome. Mr. Winter Soldier sir, I bet Dr. Banner would let us use his lab. You want to come with me?”

Peter looked at Bucky with wide doe eyes and the super soldier found himself nodding and following Peter without even realizing it until they were alone outside of the elevator. Peter was holding the plate of pancakes, eating as he walked.

“Кто этот ребенок?” [*Who is this kid?*] Bucky asked himself.

“That information is confidential,” JARVIS alerted from the ceiling.

“Игнорировать JARVIS,” [*Ignore JARVIS,*] Peter said in poorly accented Russian. “Apparently no one can ask potentially revealing questions.”

“ты говоришь по-русски?” [*You speak Russian?*]

“Not really,” Peter said as JARVIS opened the elevator for them. “Natash—I mean, the Black Widow taught me a bit yesterday. I’m okay at the words but my pronunciation is bad. There are all these shapes I can’t make with my mouth, so the sounds don’t sound right, if that makes sense.”

“Needing practice,” Bucky grunted as Peter pressed the button for the 87th floor.

Peter shoveled a syrupy mess of pancake into his mouth. “How long did it take you to learn?” he asked. Except, as always, his mouth was full, so it sounded more like ‘ow ong id id ake ooh do luhn?’

Bucky arched an eyebrow at the teenager. “I do not remember. I was not... present for it.”

“Oh. Your past is pretty messed up, isn’t it.”

“That... is one way to put it.”

“That’s fine. I won’t push you to tell me anything. Obviously I can’t tell you about my past or JARVIS will yell at me, and that’s not cool. But if you want to tell me about yours that’s totally fine! I’m an awesome listener. And I’m really good at keeping secrets, too. Like, this one time Ne —um, my friend and I were at Coney Island, and he spilled a banana slushie all over his lap because the ferris wheel started rocking, and then it kind of looked like he peed himself, and then a five-year-old girl made fun of him for it? Never told anyone.”

“Clearly. He is lucky to have friend in you.”

“Thanks,” Peter grinned, not picking up on Bucky’s sarcasm.

The elevator opened onto the 87th floor and Peter made his way to Bruce’s lab.

“Hey Dr. Banner, is it cool if Bucky and I tinker around in here?”

“Yeah, sure, but you know Tony built you your own lab already, right? On the 85th floor.”

“What! Why didn’t he tell me? Wait,” Peter said, pulling out his cellphone and seeing two missed texts, which he quickly responded to.

[IronMan]

You have a lab now

85th floor

Password underoos

[TheKid]

WHAAAAAAAAAAAAA XD XD XD

The other text was from Ned.

[ChairGuy]

News flash: Flash is still a jerk

History sub today, so we're watching Jurassic Park for some reason?

Miss you

[TheKid]

Miss you too

Tho I'm gonna do science today

In my own lab WHAAAAAAT

Peter slipped the phone back into the pocket of his jeans and reached out to grab Bucky's wrist.

Bruce noticed the motion and shouted. "Hey kid, don't do th—"

The teen's hand made contact with Bucky's, and nothing happened. Bruce's eyes boggled; the last time he'd even accidentally touched the Winter Soldier he'd wound up with two bruised ribs. Not even Steve touched the super soldier. And now Bucky was just letting the kid grab him as if it were nothing new?

"Nevermind," Bruce mumbled. "Have fun in your lab."

JARVIS had held the elevator open for them, so the pair quickly made their way down two floors. The elevator opened to the 85th floor, but there was nothing besides a small room with a single door. On the door was a small nameplate—The Kid. There was no handle, but beside the door was a card swiper, fingerprint scanner, and retina scanner.

Raising an impressed eyebrow at Bucky, Peter swiped his gold ID card. A blue light appeared, glowing around the fingerprint scanner, so Peter assumed that was the next step. After his thumbprint was accepted, the retina scanner engaged, which Peter also passed. He had no idea how Tony had gotten ahold of his fingerprints or a detailed scan of his eye, but it was pretty cool.

"Password," a female-voiced AI spoke.

"Holy cannoli, Karen? Hey, I missed you!"

"Same, Kid. But I still can't let you in without the password."

"Um, underoos?" Peter said tentatively.

"Welcome, Kid." A red and blue patterned light shone around the edges of the door, which slid soundlessly into the wall.

Dazzled, Peter and Bucky walked into the lab. Unlike Bruce's, there were no dividing walls. On the far wall were a few more doors with their own card and fingerprint scanners. Peter tried to open them as well, but was blocked when the password 'underoos' wouldn't work on them. He shrugged and continued to explore. In addition to two bathrooms and a shower room, there was a small corner gym, an entire kitchen with a stocked fridge, and a plush seating area with a giant TV. Peter could see a couple gaming consoles, including the next StarkGamer, which wasn't supposed to come out for another year.

But the coolest parts were the lab stations. It looked like there was one based on each Avenger, and one for Spider-Man too. Each station had pieces of the Avenger's armor or weapons, schematics, and materials to work on them.

“He wants you to make us better,” Bucky said in awe, looking around and quickly realizing what the lab was set up for. “Stark built this for you, for us.”

The super soldier turned to look at Peter, only to notice that the teenager was no longer next to him. Looking around in a panic, he finally found the kid curled up on the couch, fat tears dripping down his face.

“Why?” Peter asked flatly. “Why would Mr. Stark do this for me? He barely knows me. I’m not worth it.”

“You are wrong, kid,” Bucky said, sitting close to Peter. He hesitantly put an arm around the kid’s shoulders. Peter leaned in to the larger man. “Stark is smart. You should trust him if he thinks you’re worth it. I think you’re worth it.”

Bucky’s uncomfortably affectionate speech was interrupted by a faint snore coming from Peter. Apparently the kid had become so overwhelmed that he fell asleep. Not wanting to wake Peter by moving his arm, Bucky sat there, stock still, for the next five hours. At which point Tony stopped by to see why Peter wasn’t in the penthouse for dinner, and woke the teen up to lead him to bed (after snapping a few incriminating photos first, of course).

The Gods Must Be Crazy

“Aha, child, you are already risen. This is good,” Thor’s voice boomed across the gym.

Peter was walking laps around the track, nibbling on a PopTart. Cherry, with sprinkles. He popped the last bit into his mouth and waved at the large god before heading in his direction. As he walked, he withdrew another PopTart from his hoodie pocket—chocolate marshmallow.

“Mr. Thor, your highness, wow,” Peter tried to say, though his mouth was full. As always. Because he always forgot to swallow before talking. Which meant it sounded more like ‘idr hor, ur ihgnith, awh.’

“My young friend.” Thor swatted Peter on the back playfully, but the pure force of the large god’s movement caused Peter to stumble forward and spit out his PopTart. Spit it out all over Loki, who’d just walked up to the pair.

“Really,” the greasy god intoned. “I thought your pet would be house-trained.”

“Whoa,” Peter said. “Nice burn.”

“Indeed.”

“Who is burnt?” Thor asked, puzzled.

“It’s just a sa—” Peter paused, looking at Loki slowly shaking his head. “What?”

“We try not to introduce too much Earth slang into his vocabulary. It’s funnier that way.”

“Oh, mood.”

“Indeed,” Loki agreed. He brought his nose down towards the crumbs splattered across his black leather doublet. “What is this wretched pastry?”

“PopTart,” Peter said, shrugging.

“No. We’re getting brunch, like civilized people. There’s a passable restaurant on the third floor.”

Despite Loki’s pestering, Peter decided not to change into one of the three-piece suits Happy had gotten for him. Instead, he wore the same dark jeans and navy hoodie (hiding a signed Kiss t-shirt, which why the heck would they give him, it was probably worth several hundred dollars) that he’d put on that morning. They took the private Avengers elevator to the third floor, and were given a table immediately when the maître d’ noticed Thor. Peter and Loki weren’t recognized; Peter didn’t mind, but Loki seemed a bit miffed. A waiter hurried over.

“We’ll have three pints, barman,” Thor boomed.

The waiter looked at him with a cocked eyebrow. “I’m going to need to see some ID from the child.”

“Do you not know who this is? Why, it is the child of Tony Stark. He does not require identification to drink heartily in the abode of his father.”

“Sure,” the waiter said doubtfully before heading away.

“Um, Mr. Stark’s not my dad,” Peter said to the god.

Thor tilted his head in confusion before letting out another sunny smile and roaring laugh. “So you are not fruit of his loins, but that does not make you any less his son, does it, Loki? My brother was also adopted, but we are no less family because of it.”

“Oh really,” Loki said wryly.

“There is much brotherly love, it is true. Why, he hasn’t even tried to stab me in several weeks worth of time.”

“That’s not a great measure for love, Mr. Thor.” Peter looked taken aback, slightly glad he’d never had siblings. “And I’m not adopted either.”

“Then where are your parents, child?” Thor questioned, looking around.

“You do not have clearance to ask the kid that question,” JARVIS said loudly over the restaurant’s loudspeaker. Peter blushed and slunk down in his seat, hoping no one knew the AI was talking about him. A few patrons kept looking for the voice’s source, but the others were used to the eccentricities that followed eating in the Avengers Tower.

“Ah, building, I apologize for asking questions the kid cannot answer.”

“No, it’s okay,” Peter said, slightly saddened. Most of the time he did okay, knowing his parents and Uncle Ben were dead, because at least he still had Aunt May. But having been in the tower for several days without being able to see her was starting to take its toll on him.

His thoughts were interrupted by the waiter, returning with two large beers and a glass of ice water, which the man put in front of Peter. He opened his pad and took out a pen, looking expectantly at Loki.

“Lox.”

“Very good. And for you, sir?” he said, turning to Thor.

“Ah yes, steak, rare. And the ribs. And whatever this eggs benedict is. And French toast.”

The waiter didn’t seem thrown off by the amount of food Thor was ordering. Based on their familiarity, Peter guessed the gods had eaten here before. The older man turned to Peter and raised an eyebrow, waiting on his order.

“That sounds good, I’ll have the same.”

“The French toast?”

“All of it. And a side of bacon, please.”

The waiter hesitated, before writing down the order and heading away. Loki waited until Peter had taken a large mouthful of water before speaking again.

“So if you do not call Stark dad, perhaps you call him... Daddy?”

Peter spit the mouthful of water out, soaking Thor, as JARVIS chimed in, “You do not have clearance to ask the kid that question.”

“Shut up, JARVIS,” Peter screeched at the ceiling, drawing stares from the other patrons. “Tell Tony to stuff it, I’m definitely not leaving that question unanswered.”

“I do not understand,” Thor said. “How would calling the Man of Iron ‘daddy’ be any different?”

Loki was cackling madly, increasing in volume with every shade darker Peter’s blush turned.

“No, you flipping lunatic—Mr. Loki, stop laughing, you’re not as funny as you think you are. I definitely don’t call Mr. Stark *that*. Oh go to heck, what the fudge nuggets! Ew, that’s just—gross.”

“Wow, kid, I hadn’t figured you for a homophobe,” Loki said, trying—and failing—to stop laughing.

“I’m not—that’s not fair and you know it. Plus, it’d be pretty hypocritical if I were against other people being gay, since—”

“You do not have clearance to divulge personal information about the kid,” JARVIS piped up.

“I am the kid, you freaking omniscient bobblehead!” Peter yelled at the ceiling.

“I do not know what has caused you to become angered,” Thor said, putting a reassuring hand on Peter’s shoulder as the god finished wiping the spit water from his face. “But you must understand, Loki is a youngest brother. He had me to pull pranks on as children—remember that time where you pretended to be a snake and then stabbed me?—but he was never given the chance to embarrass a younger sibling. It is quite heartwarming to watch.”

“Way to ruin the mood, Thor,” Loki groaned. “Now that he knows I was just teasing he won’t be as easy to humiliate.”

“You’re not going to stab me, though, right?” Peter asked, looking at the pale man suspiciously, and wondering whether he needed to hide the butter knives.

“I wasn’t planning on it.”

“Good. Because it hurts. Or, I mean, I’d assume it hurts. Not like I’ve ever been stabbed or

anything. Just seen it in movies. It looks painful.”

“It is, my child friend,” Thor said. “Besides, Loki has only stabbed me, his older brother, so I am fairly confident he won’t stab his new younger brother as well.”

The food came, and it was an enormous amount. Loki ate his single meal daintily, as Thor dug in with unbridled (and slightly disgusting) zest. Peter used his best table manners—after all, this was the sort of restaurant with actual cloth napkins, way too fancy for what he was used to, and he didn’t want to embarrass Tony in any way. But as Thor was winding down eating, stuck on his last few sticks of French toast, Peter was finishing his bacon.

“Do you mind if I...? Thanks,” Peter said, snagging one of the pieces of French toast from Thor’s plate. “This is awesome,” he said as he stuck it in his mouth. Which, of course, sounded like ‘idth ith athun.’

“Swallow, kid,” Loki interjected. Peter’s habit of talking with his mouth full was simultaneously disgusting and endearing, and the god didn’t know how to handle it.

“Sorry, Mr. Loki, sir.”

Loki waved a hand dismissively at the teenager. “What are we supposed to do with you for the rest of the day? It’s not like we can ask you any actual questions, or go outside, or get into any actual trouble.”

“I don’t know, to be honest. I’m kind of running out of things to do. At first it was really cool being at the Avengers Tower, because, duh. Meeting all of you, and getting to see the labs? It’s like a nerd’s dream come true. But I miss my Aun—my roommate, and my friends. And being Spi—um, being able to spend time outside, and by myself. And unless I’m in the penthouse, I can’t even go to the bathroom without one of you guys coming too. It’s like being in jail.”

“Well, not quite,” Loki muttered.

“Can you still speak with your roommate and friends? Do they have access to a cellular telephone or the electronic mail?” Thor asked.

“I text my friend, but my roommate...” Peter sighed. The only reason he’d been able to text Ned is because the other boy was as big a nerd as he was, and had double-encrypted his own StarkPhone with tri-VPN-loopback, making it almost as secure as the StarkPhone Peter had.

“Then let us text your friend, young brother,” Thor beamed. “Then you will show us the labs you have discovered.”

When the waiter came back to clear their plates, he was roped into taking a picture of the three of them—Peter was standing so his head could be cropped out of the picture, Thor was giving a big thumbs up and holding a piece of paper that said ‘hi guy in the chair,’ and Loki was dabbing.

[TheKid]

Still miss you guys

But check out these actual gods XDDD

Thor says hello

Loki wants me to tell you he also says hello but that he’s better than Thor

[ChairGuy]

AHHHHHHHHH

Didn’t you use to have the biggest crush on Thor, like with a poster over your bed and everything?

Are you freaking out? Did you try to kiss him?

[TheKid]

Bruhyyyy

They are deadass sitting right next to me and reading over my shoulder

You are dead to me

[ChairGuy]

Bruhyyyy :((((

“You didn’t see anything,” Peter said, shutting his screen off. “But if anyone asks, Mr. Stark is my favorite Avenger and always has been.”

“Wow, guess I don’t have to keep trying so hard to embarrass you, if you’re able to do it so effortlessly on your own,” Loki said.

“I don’t get it?” Thor said.

“Good,” Peter said, standing up. “Did you guys still want to check out my lab? Ooh, can we stop at the coffee cart on the way first? Their muffins are ridiculous.”

Family Movie Night

Around 3 p.m., Thor and Loki burst out of the Avengers’ elevator into the common room, dragging a pale and groaning Peter between them. Tony was in the middle of a phone call, drinking coffee at the kitchen counter, when he saw them.

“What the hell did you two do to my kid?” he yelled, darting forward to help them move Peter to the couch.

Both Loki and Thor spoke at the same time. “Why do you assume we did something?” “Is our young brother going to be okay?”

“Just too loud, too bright,” Peter slurred. “Mr. Stark, can you turn off the lights?”

The lights weren’t on; the large windows in the penthouse provided enough sunlight during day hours. But Peter’s enhanced senses came with a downside—occasional sensory overload, where even the smallest noises or dimmest lights could be painful.

“Help me get him to his room,” Tony whisper-shouted at the two gods. “And keep your voices down.”

The three of them quickly went up to Tony’s personal floor of the penthouse and laid Peter down on the teen’s bed.

“Karen, activate ‘I wear my sunglasses at night’ protocol,” Tony whispered into the room.

Immediately the windows dimmed black, the room became silent except for very soft white noise, and a slight scent of lavender wafted through the air vents. Tony went into the teen’s desk drawer and pulled out a pair of noise-cancelling headphones and wrap-around sunglasses, and put both on Peter’s head.

“Hey kid, why don’t you stay here for a bit until you’re feeling better?” Tony whispered, positive the teen could still hear despite the headphones. “We’ll be in the common room, you can join us when you’re ready.”

He didn’t wait for a response, but lead the two Asgardians out and shut the sound-proof door behind him.

“Did we break him?” Thor asked nervously.

“No,” Tony sighed, leading them back down to the shared Avengers floor. “It’s kind of like a migraine. Sometimes the kid’s senses get a little overwhelmed and he needs to be in dark and quiet to re-calibrate them.”

“And he will be okay?” Loki asked.

Tony raised an eyebrow at the trickster god. “You actually care about the kid’s well-being?” he scoffed.

“Loki has adopted the child and he is now our brother. Does this make you our father, Man of Iron?”

“Jesus Christ, Thor, what is wrong with you? No wait, don’t answer that. Yes, Loki, the kid will be fine. And how would I be your father, aren’t you two like thousands of years old?”

“Midgardian and Asgardian time pass differently, Anthony,” Loki said. “In your years, I am only 17.”

“Seriously?” Tony said. “That explains so much. And you guys do realize I’m not the kid’s dad, right? I mean, *obviously* I care about him, he’s one of the best people I’ve ever met. His morals are straighter than Cap’s, he’s funny and sweet and kind, not to mention smarter than anyone I know. So what if I’m not the kid’s dad, I’d be proud if I were. I love him like a father, anyway.”

“Mr. Stark,” a wobbly voice came from the bottom of the stairs. Peter, still wearing the blackout sunglasses and noise-cancelling headphones, was standing there with his mouth trembling. If his eyes were visible, there’d probably have been tears there too. “Do you mean it?”

“What are you doing up?” Tony whispered.

“Do you mean it?”

“Obviously. Are the headphones working?”

“You don’t have to whisper, they’re super helpful. When did you design these? And the wrap-around sunglasses are super effective. Do I get to keep them? Are they both Stark-designed? And have you considered mass-producing them? There’s a shortage of assistive technology for people with sensory issues, and this would be an awesome addition to your prosthetics and mobility department.” Peter was still a little sluggish, though he was more alert than he’d been a half hour ago.

“What happened to calling me ‘Tony’?”

“I... what? When did I—”

“JARVIS, play back the tape.”

Peter heard the recording of himself yelling at JARVIS earlier in the day. ‘*Shut up, JARVIS. Tell Tony to stuff it.*’

“Mr. Stark, I am so sorry! I didn’t realize it was being recorded, and I never—”

“Kid, this was the highlight of my week,” Tony said. “I’m making it my new ringtone for you. And you’re welcome to call me Tony, you know. I kind of like it.”

“Oh.” Peter was silent for a minute, trying to figure out whether he would be brave enough to actually call his mentor by his first name. “I can try, Mr. S—Tony.” He smiled.

“And the child claims he’s not Anthony’s son,” Loki said. Both Peter and Tony had forgotten the gods were still there.

“I’m not—” Peter started.

“Just roll with it,” Tony said under his breath, knowing that Peter’s enhanced hearing would pick it up. “By the way, did Loki and Thor adopt you as their brother?”

“Yeah.”

“Huh. You hungry?”

“Always, Mr. S—Tony.”

At that moment, Natasha and Clint walked into the room. Or rather Natasha walked into the room, and Clint fell down from the ventilation shaft above them.

“Are you ordering food?” Clint asked. “What’s with the getup, kid?”

“Our young brother had a migraine,” Thor said, keeping his voice much quieter than usual. “Somehow the disguise helps.”

“Your brother?” Clint asked, mock hurt. “Kid, what happened to the murder triplets?”

Peter sighed. “Yeah, sorry Thor. I already told Nata—um, the Black Widow and Mr. Hawkeye that they could be my siblings first.”

“We can share,” Natasha said, shrugging as she plopped down on the couch. “Tony, what’re you ordering?”

“I wasn’t aware I was feeding all of you,” Tony said sternly. “But is pizza okay?”

“What’s this about pizza?” Steve said as he walked in, Bucky trailing behind. “New York style?”

“Obviously, Mr. Captain Rogers, sir,” Peter said, smiling. “Mr. S—Tony, can you get some for Dr. Banner too?”

“Is this going to turn into family dinner night?” Tony said. “Fine. See if I care. Just wanted some one-on-one time with my kid, and now I’ve got to deal with all of you—”

“Shut up, Tony,” Pepper said as she came out of the elevator. She stepped out of her heels and curled her toes before picking up the offending shoes and heading towards the kitchen. “You’ve got him all day tomorrow. Can’t you let them have some time with the kid?”

“Et tu, Pepper?” Tony said, clutching the arc reactor over his heart. “You wound me.”

Peter giggled, but he could see Tony placing an order for pizza on his phone. A lot of pizza. Enough pizza to feed the handful of superheroes and enhanced super soldiers who would be there.

By the time the pizza was delivered to the front desk of the Avengers Tower, and Happy brought up the twenty boxes on a cart, Bruce had indeed showed up. Everyone grabbed plates and sat on the large sofa.

Peter looked up at the giant screen TV in front of them and asked, to no one in particular, “Movie night?”

“I can do you one better, kid,” Tony said, smirking. “JARVIS, cue up the Captain America PSAs.”

Steve blanched, and the other Avengers looked at him in confusion. “How did you—”

“The kid told me,” Tony said. The screen flickered to life.

“Kid,” Steve said, looking at Peter.

“I didn’t—okay, maybe I did, but not on purpose! I was telling Mr. S—Tony about how I’d told off a bully, and I used some of the lines from one of your videos, and it was super effective! But I didn’t mean to tell him. I mean, I didn’t realize it was a secret. And they’re not that bad, and—okay, that was a lie, they’re pretty embarrassing. But they do actually help sometimes.”

“Steve, what is the kid talking about?” Bucky asked in a low voice.

“I—”

But then the Captain America on the screen started talking. “So you’ve started to notice your body is changing...”

“Shit,” Steve said. This was one of the worst of the videos.

“Language,” Peter said, smirking. He’d already seen this one, so he pulled out his cellphone to text Ned.

[TheKid]

Watching the Cap PSAs with the Avengers lol

They didn’t know about them

Cap’s face AHHHHH XD

[ChairGuy]

Jealous

But need to get to sleep

Field trip tomorrow, will miss you. Who’s supposed to be my bus buddy?

[TheKid]

I’m sure you’ll live :’((((

Ask MJ, maybe she can draw you in distress missing me

[ChairGuy]

:(miss you

“It’s official,” Clint said. “I never want to hear Cap say the word ‘masturbate’ ever again.” He stood up and headed for the stairs, apparently satisfied to take the normal way up to his and Natasha’s floor instead of crawling through the vents.

“But it’s ‘perfectly natural for a growing boy,’ Clint. Weren’t you watching?” Natasha asked, barely keeping a straight face.

“I hate you all,” Steve said. “C’mon, Bucky, let’s head up.”

“No, I am learning,” the super soldier replied, eyes glued to the screen.

“Don’t worry, Manchurian candidate. We can watch more of them tomorrow.” Tony flicked off the TV. He looked at his watch, surprised that it was already 10 p.m. “All of you, out. The kid’s got to catch up on sleep.”

Tony knew how much one of Peter’s sensory shut-downs took out of him, and the 20-minute nap the teenager had grabbed earlier wasn’t enough by a long-shot. Of course, going to sleep this early likely meant that Peter would wake up at a disgustingly early time, but he could tell the kid was fading fast.

Despite some good-natured grumbles, the Avengers began to filter out of the common room. Bruce and Pepper had left an hour earlier, since they tended to get to bed early. Natasha and Clint headed up the stairs, followed by Steve and Bucky. Thor and Loki stood up and stretched before walking towards the elevator.

“Wait, Mr. Thor, your Majesty! You forgot your hammer thing,” Peter said, grabbing Mjölnir from the coffee table and sprinting after the god.

Tony’s eyes bugged out. Loki looked like he was trying not to smirk, waiting to see his brother’s dismayed reaction at someone being able to lift his hammer. But Thor was not dismayed. To the contrary, a giant smile broke out on the blond god’s face.

“Aha, youngest brother Stark-son, I am not surprised. Loki, did you see?” Thor took the hammer from Peter, followed by wrapping the teenager in a tight hug and lifting him off his feet as he spun around. “I knew the child would be our brother. And now, a rightful heir of Asgard? I am overjoyed.”

“Wha—Mr. Thor, can you put me down? Thanks,” Peter said, dusting off his now-wrinkled shirt. “I didn’t figure you’d be that grateful that I gave you your hammer back.”

“Kid,” Tony said slowly. “Only the rightful heir to Asgard can lift Thor’s hammer. Loki can’t, none of the Avengers can. I certainly can’t.”

“Oh. Huh.” Peter tilted his head like a puppy. “Well, that’s neat. And I’ll probably totally freak out over it in the morning. But I’m actually sleepy, can we talk about this tomorrow? Or, you know, never?”

Part of Peter worried that this would reveal his secret identity as Spider-Man to the gods, but it didn’t seem that they thought him anything other than a normal teenager—just one who apparently had been deemed ‘worthy’ by a large metal tool.

Loki looked at Peter appraisingly. “If you say so, little brother. We don’t need to talk about it. With you, at least. Thor should probably let Heimdall know, but we don’t expect you to do anything different.”

“Good night, child. As the television says, sleep tight and do not allow the bugs in your bed to bite you in your slumber.” Thor gripped Peter’s shoulder hard, before heading towards the stairs, Loki following behind.

“You never cease to amaze me, kid,” Tony said, ruffling Peter’s head as the teenager let out a yawn. “Now get to sleep. You and I have got a big day tomorrow.”

Peter nodded and headed to the elevators so he could return to Tony’s floor of the penthouse. Tony stayed behind, muttering about PSAs and rightful heirs as he picked up the remaining pizza boxes and threw them away. Not for the first time, he regretted that they weren’t able to allow the tower janitors into the penthouse because of security restrictions. But tomorrow was his day on protection duty, and he looked forward to spending it with Peter.

Gen-Z Takes Over the Tower

Gen-Z Takes Over the Tower

Tony Stark was not a morning person. In fact, he was unpleasant—or, rather, more unpleasant than usual—before ten a.m. So when Tony walked into the kitchen that morning at 9, Peter already knew to be wary.

Of course, Peter had been up since 5, newly energized since his sensory issues from the previous day had waned: he'd taken a ten-mile run in the gym, showered, eaten breakfast, gotten dressed, changed his mind and put his pajamas back on, watched a few baking shows, and eaten a second breakfast. He was working on preparing his third breakfast when he saw Tony rummaging through the cabinets.

“Did you seriously finish off my coffee?” Tony grumbled.

Peter stopped pouring milk on his Lucky Charms, which filled the large mixing bowl he was using to eat out of. “Crap, did I? I’m sorry, Tony.”

“Good, call me Tony. But bad, need coffee.”

“I can run down to the coffee cart and grab you something?”

“Double mocha latte extra whip. Don’t forget your ID.” Tony barely looked at the teenager, sitting down at the table and putting his head in his hands.

Peter grabbed the gold ID card and put the Hello Kitty lanyard around his neck. It matched the Hello Kitty fuzzy pajama pants he was wearing. The oversized ‘Stark Expo 2017’ t-shirt he had on slipped over one shoulder, showing his collar bones. He threw on Pepper’s UGG boots, tucked the pants into them, and grabbed his bowl of Lucky Charms, walking slowly to the elevator while shoveling it in his mouth.

“JARVIS, coffee,” Peter said. Of course, with so much sugary cereal in his mouth, it sounded like ‘garis, ogfee.’ But, luckily, JARVIS understood what the teen was saying and opened the elevator doors for him, whisking him towards the mezzanine with the coffee cart.

As Peter was about to exit the elevator, he noticed Mr. Harrington leading the decathlon team through the lobby to the front desk. This was bad. This was so, so bad. Apparently the field trip that Ned had been talking about was to Stark Industries. It didn’t surprise Peter that Ned hadn’t given him a head’s up and mentioned that they were going to be coming to the Avengers Tower; after all, Ned didn’t know that’s where Peter was staying.

“Call Mr. Stark. JARVIS, please, close the elevator doors and call Tony.”

“Yes, kid,” the AI said.

“Did you forget already? Double mocha la—” Tony started through the line.

“My class—they’re here. From school, I mean. They’re on a field trip. I think Mr. Harrington might have already seen me. What do I—”

“JARVIS, engage the kid’s ‘silent treatment’ protocol on all badges from that field trip. Kid, if

they've seen you, then it's probably too late to run. So forget about getting me a coffee. Suck it up and go say hi and then come right back. I'll have JARVIS watching out for you, okay? And tell JARVIS if it goes haywire and I'll come down personally and fetch you, alright? But me coming down right now would probably be more suspicious that if you just went to them, capisce?"

"Yeah, I capisce." Peter took a deep breath. "JARVIS, take me to the lobby."

The elevator doors opened and Peter heard a beeping coming from the StarkPhone he'd shoved in the pockets of his pajama pants.

[ChairGuy]

Um, I can see you

Like, right now

And I'm not saying that in a creepy way

[TheKid]

I know, I'm coming over

Peter slowly walked over to the decathlon team. "Hey, Mr. Harrington. Didn't realize you would be here."

"What the heck is Peter doing here?" Flash Thompson, the biggest jerk on the team, tried to say. However, the guest ID around his neck let out a large buzzing noise over Peter's name, so it sounded like 'What the heck is [BLEEP] doing here?'

"What was that?" a girl named Cindy asked.

"I wasn't aware you were going to be on this field trip, [BLEEP]," Mr. Harrington said. "I mean, [BLEEP]. Um, Mr. [BLEEP]. What the heck?"

With a groan, Peter realized what the 'silent treatment' protocol was. JARVIS had hacked into the guest ID passes and they now buzzed whenever the wearer tried to say Peter's name. Well, this was awkward. Sheepishly, Peter rubbed the back of his neck.

"Yeah, you're not really allowed to say my name right now. Did Happy—um, Mr. Hogan, the head of security make you sign NDAs? I think they have a section about how there might be additional security protocols? I guess this is one, not being able to say my name. For right now, the tower staff has been calling me 'the kid.'"

"Is this part of your internship here?" Ned asked, eyes wide.

"Oh come on, tubby. Everyone knows that Penis [BLEEP]'s internship was a lie. Wait, we can still call you Penis? Guess that works for me." Flash laughed, and Peter deflated. At least none of the Avengers were around to hear the nickname. He shuddered to think how it'd go over with his new, protective friends.

"You do not have clearance to ask The Kid that question," JARVIS said from the ceiling, booming across the noisy lobby.

"Not helping," Peter shouted at the ceiling. "Yeah, sure, Ned. It's part of my internship."

Yeah, right. Because *all* the interns at Stark Towers clearly had their names redacted, and the building's AI preventing people from asking questions. It was bad enough that he was dressed in his fuzzy pink pajamas still, he didn't need to give Flash and his cronies more ammunition.

“Cool,” Ned said.

“Yeah, right, Penis,” Flash said. “I don’t know how you hacked the building’s security, but it’s pathetic.”

“Well, now that we’ve got this really fun conversation out of the way, I’m going to be going.” Peter started backing up towards the elevator.

“Mr. [BLEEP]—I mean, kid. Where do you think you’re going? Without a proper adult supervisor, I can’t exactly let you wander away,” Mr. Harrington said. “I’m pretty sure that would break some school code of conduct of some sort.”

Peter mumbled under his breath, handing his mixing bowl of Lucky Charms to Ned so he could pull up his StarkPhone and speed-dial Tony.

“S.O.S. Mr. Harrington is trying to keep me here until he can hand me over to an adult supervisor. Can you come get me?”

“Crap. I just got pulled into a board meeting and Pepper is kind of giving me the stink-eye for answering the phone—*yes you are, honey*—and I don’t know if I can get out with my relationship intact. Is ‘silent treatment’ working alright? If it is, you might as well just go on the tour with them. Otherwise, I can always try to find one of the other Avengers, but I don’t know if your teacher would release you to them. I can’t believe we didn’t know about this stupid freaking field trip until—*no, I don’t have a son, Mr. Murimoto, not that it’s any of your business, jackass*—okay, now Pepper’s actually getting mad. Do you want me to call one of them?”

“No, that’s okay Tony. But can you get Happy to come on the tour with us? Please?”

“He’s heading to your ‘roommate’s’ apartment for the day, but I can get him to stay—”

“Ooh, no, don’t do that, I don’t want her to think anything’s wrong. Besides, it was my idea to have him go over there anyway. Has he said anything about it? Like how they’re getting along? Has he asked her out on a date yet? I mean, I don’t know if I’m ready for her to date yet, but it’s been long enough that Google says it’s healthy, and I do want her to be happy, you know? I really wish I could talk to her, and—”

Mr. Harrington clearing his throat behind Peter made him realize that the entire team was watching him on the phone.

“Just have fun with your class,” Tony said. “I got to go. But I’ll try and get you once I have time, okay kid?” Tony hung up without waiting for a response, and Peter sighed.

“Guess I’ll be going on the tour with you.”

“What the hell was that, Penis?” Flash said. “Clearly wasn’t your parents, since we all know your parents are d—”

“You do not have clearance to divulge personal information about The Kid.” JARVIS’s voice rang through the lobby again.

“Flash, you might as well just leave me alone,” Peter said. “Otherwise, at least quit being such a B-movie villain and get some more original material.”

“Yeah right, Penis. Once I figure out how you hacked into their system, I’ll turn you in myself. Maybe they’ll give me an award, for exposing your lies and finding their security flaw.”

As Mr. Harrington struggled to get the field trip back on track, the tour guide walked towards them.

“Hello, Midtown,” she said in a crisp voice, easily heard over the bustle of the lobby. “My name is Krystle and I’ll be your tour guide at Stark Industries today. Everyone has their guest ID badges?” The teenagers nodded their heads, glancing down at their white badges. Peter held his cereal bowl in front of his chest, glad no one had noticed his gold badge yet. “If you’ll all follow me to the third floor, we can set up in a conference room for your orientation and to go over some ground rules.”

Gods and Ground Rules

After the teenagers had settled down at the oval conference table, Peter sitting between Ned and MJ, as far away from Flash as possible, Krystle began talking again.

“I want to make it clear that, although we allow visitors and guided tours of the Avengers Tower, Stark Industries is first and foremost a business. We employ over 5,000 people at this location, and another 2,000 at our various international headquarters. What this means for you is that we want to make tours as non-disruptive as possible so that our employees can do their jobs.

“So stick close to the tour, don’t interact with our employees unless it’s an emergency, and above all else be respectful. SI is an equal-opportunity employer, and here at the Avengers Tower we employ people of every age group, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, and ability. From the cleaning staff to the scientists to the Avengers themselves, we expect you to treat everyone with the same amount of respect as well.”

“Are we gonna get to meet the Avengers?” Flash interrupted her.

“Probably not, they’re very busy. If you see any of them, feel free to look all you want. But do not approach them, try to talk to them, or take pictures. Actually, you’re not permitted to take pictures anywhere in SI, but that was already covered in the NDA you all signed.”

“What if they try to talk to us?”

“*If* an Avenger approaches you, and *if* they try to talk to you, then you may respond. Be polite and courteous, and do not ask any questions or take up more of their time than they intended. But I’m fairly certain that no Avenger will approach our tour. Now—”

At that moment the door blasted open and Loki staggered in. “What have you done with my brother?” he yelled.

“Mr. Odinson?” Krystle asked shakily, recognizing the lean pale god in his green leather armor. “Thor isn’t in here.” She stood, motioning for the high school students to get behind her.

“Not Thor, you ninny. My younger brother. Where is he? Thor saw him enter with you. I demand you unhand the kid at once.”

“Mr. Loki, chill out. You’re embarrassing me,” Peter hissed. He was the only person remaining seated at the table. The other teenagers (and a frightened Mr. Harrison) were huddled behind Krystle. The young woman was clearly terrified, but thought it her duty to protect her tour group.

“What the hell is going on?” Flash muttered.

“Can I speak to Mr. Loki outside for a second?” Peter asked. Without waiting for a reply, he said “Thanks,” and headed out into the hallway, dragging the god behind him.

“Aha, Loki has indeed rescued you as he said he would,” Thor boomed, sweeping Peter up into a hug.

“Keep your voice down, Mr. Thor sir.” Peter shut the door to the conference room. “Loki didn’t rescue me. I mean, if I had been in trouble, he totally would have, and thanks, Mr. Loki, it’s nice to know you’re on my side. I don’t care what the news says, you’re a good guy and I’m happy to be your friend. But, like I said, I wasn’t in trouble. Well, I kind of am, but not the kind that requires rescuing, if that makes sense? That’s my class. From school. They’re apparently here on a field trip and I kind of got roped into taking the tour with them.”

“But this is not a field,” Thor said, puzzled.

Loki rolled his eyes at his older brother before returning to Peter. “But you are without a bodyguard. Who is supposed to be watching you? What if the HYDRA kidnappers return?”

“Mr. S—Tony is on duty today, but I went down to the lobby to get us coffee this morning, and I saw my class and the teacher wouldn’t let me go without an adult, but Tony had wound up in a meeting he couldn’t get out of. So he’s having JARVIS look out for me right now. Plus, my friends are here,” Peter said, looking wistfully at the door to the conference room. “My guy in the chair is in there, and I haven’t seen him in over a week.”

Narrowing his eyes, Thor waved at Peter with his hammer. “Alright, we will allow you to return to the children and go to their field. But if anything happens, use your pocket telephone to contact Loki’s pocket telephone and inform us of your location.”

“Thor, you don’t have a cellphone?” Peter asked, eyes wide. “How am I supposed to add you on Snapchat?”

“Give me your number, kid,” Loki said, punching it into his own StarkPhone and sending a quick text to Peter. “I’ll send you a Snapchat friend request in a few minutes. And don’t worry, I’ll make sure to show them to Thor if you want.”

“You’re the best, Mr. Loki,” Peter said, smiling. “But I’ve got to get back to the tour. If you don’t mind, that is.”

“Give our regards to your guy in the chair,” Thor boomed as Peter opened the conference room door. “We are heading to Asgard now, but we will see you when we all sup tonight.”

“Why are you going there?” Peter asked, pausing at the opened door.

“Legal crap,” Loki said, “about the whole rightful heir business. Plus, Thor’s trying to reintroduce me to our people so they stop trying to attack me every time I visit.” He rolled his eyes.

“Until later, child,” Thor said.

Peter waved weakly as the gods walked off, then sat in the chair next to Ned, slinking down in his seat. He didn’t want to think about that ‘rightful heir’ thing. “Sorry,” he mumbled to Krystle. “They won’t bother us again.”

“Dude,” Ned whispers, sitting back down next to Peter. “Did Thor just say ‘hi’ to me?”

“What the hell was that, Penis?” Flash said loudly, as he sat back down. “You paying off the low-level Avenger-wannabes to pretend to know you? Pathetic.”

“Shut up, Eugene,” MJ said as she sat on Peter’s other side. The girl took out her people-in-crisis sketchbook and opened it. Peter saw a doodle of Ned staring out the window of the schoolbus before she turned to a new page.

Peter turned redder and drew the mixing bowl of now-soggy cereal closer to his chest. MJ stared at him as she started to draw his mortified expression.

“I apologize for the interruption,” Krystle said, as she motioned for the rest of the kids to sit back down. “I don’t know what that was—”

“Just Penis pretending he knows the Avengers,” Flash said. “Paying them off to talk to him.”

“Shut up, Flash,” Peter whispered into his bowl. He was miserable. Besides, Flash knew he was a scholarship kid at Midtown anyways; where did the other teen think he was getting enough money to pay Loki and Thor to pretend to know him?

Krystle looked flustered. She looked over at Mr. Harrington, but he didn’t look like he’d be much help wrangling these teens.

“So, um... security,” she said, trying to remember where her speech had dropped off. “All of you have guest passes, which you’ll need to get into all the areas we’ll be looking at today. Your pass has your picture and name, and will only allow you into the floors and rooms we’re visiting. You’ll have to scan it at the door to each room, so that our building’s AI and security team know where you are at all times.

“You won’t be allowed access into any other rooms or floors. You have a white visitor badge, which is the lowest level of security. It will be deactivated at the end of the day, so you can take it home as a souvenir. Employees here have various other colors of badges and levels of access; mine is green, as are the other tour guides’.”

“What color do the Avengers have?” a girl in the class named Cindy asked.

“For the most part, the Avengers don’t wear their badges because JARVIS, the building’s AI, recognizes them by biometric scan. But they mostly have bronze-level badges. The Avengers who reside in the upper floors of the tower, plus our CEO Ms. Potts and our head-of-security Mr. Hogan, have silver-level badges. Only one gold badge exists, belonging to Mr. Stark.”

“Do interns get their own badges? And how can we become interns?” a boy named Abraham asked.

“Interns do get their own badges; they’re generally yellow for corporate internships and orange for R&D internships. It’s great that you’re interested in interning here, but you’ll have to wait a few years,” Krystle said with a smile. “We don’t accept high school students. In fact, we require that you have a masters or higher degree in a STEM field to even consider your application. Our internship program is very small, and incredibly difficult to get in to.”

“Boom, Penis,” Flash yelled. “Told you. Bet you feel like an idiot now.”

“Eugene,” Mr. Harrington interrupted. “Sit down and be quiet.”

“Whatever,” the greasy teen said. “Knew he was a liar.”

Krystle's eyes were glazing over. "Our first stop is the Avengers museum on the fifth floor. Before we head up, what questions do you have for me?"

"Why do our badges censor [BLEEP] [BLEEP]'s name?" Sally, a quiet girl on the team, asked.

"What?"

"[BLEEP]," Sally pointed to Peter. "We can't say his name."

"Um, I'm not sure? I can ask the building's AI, if you want to know? JARVIS?" Krystle said into the ceiling. "Why can't these people say their classmate's name?"

"You don't have clearance to ask that question," JARVIS said, helpfully.

"So who is the guy in the ceiling?" Abraham asked.

"JARVIS is Mr. Stark's personal AI, who also works as a building-wide AI at times. It is connected to all cameras in the building and contains encyclopedic knowledge of SI operations. Let's see, JARVIS, do you know who I am?"

"Yes. Krystle Kane, tour guide at Stark Industries."

"Can you fact check my presentation so far?" she asked, winking at the students. She asked this question frequently in front of her tour groups, since it provided additional backup for what she was saying.

"You have two incorrect statements."

"What?" she asked, surprised.

"The SI internship program currently includes a single high-school student. And there are currently two people who have gold-level badges at SI."

Peter slunk lower in his seat. Krystle looked confused.

"What? Who has gold-level access? And what intern—"

"You do not have clearance to ask those questions," JARVIS said. The entire class, and Krystle, turned to look at Peter. The teen shoved his burning face into his mixing bowl of soggy cereal.

Spiders Gotta Stick Together

After asking more questions of Krystle, and being interrupted frequently by JARVIS letting them know that didn't have clearance to ask those questions, the tour boarded one of the large SI elevators and went up to the fifth floor. At the door, each student scanned their badges as a robotic voice announced them: 'Krystle Kane, tour guide,' 'Michelle Jones, guest,' 'Eugene Thompson, guest.'

When Peter scanned his card, it wasn't the door's robotic voice that replied, but JARVIS. "The Kid. Clearance level: all access." Peter quickly ducked through the doors.

Standing between MJ and Ned, his mouth dropped open as they entered the museum. He hadn't

even realized it was here.

“Whoa,” Peter and Ned said in unison. MJ just shrugged.

“You have 45 minutes to explore,” Krystle shouted after the class as they started dispersing among the exhibits.

As Ned and MJ walked into the fray (or, rather, MJ walked as Ned practically skipped), Peter felt the hairs on his arms rise. His spidey-sense started going haywire, just as he felt a cool hand on the back of his neck.

“все хорошо?” [*Is everything alright?*] Natasha asked.

“What are you doing here? How did you know—”

“Thor самая большая сплетня в мире. Как старая русская бабушка.” [*Thor is the biggest gossip in the world. Like an old Russian grandma.*]

“Почему-то это меня не удивляет.” [*Somehow that doesn't surprise me.*] Peter chuckled.

“Почему ты здесь?” [*Why are you here?*]

“Чтобы убедиться, что вы в безопасности. Нам, паукам, нужно держаться вместе.” [*To make sure you're safe. Us spiders gotta stick together.*] She winked at him.

Peter blanched. “How did you know? Oh my god, who else knows?”

“Nobody. At least, I told nobody. And I'm pretty sure no one else knows. Well, I assume Tony knows.”

“Miss Black Widow, can you please keep this between us? I mean, I don't want to put any of you guys in danger.”

“It's between us. As long as you give me your phone so I can put my number in. And start calling me Natasha.”

“Uh huh, yeah, that'll happen,” Peter said, handing her his StarkPhone. As if he'd call the most terrifying assassin in the world by her first name. She handed the phone back to him, having sent herself a text to give her his number too.

“Whoa, [BLEEP]—I mean, kid, come check this out! They've got an exhibit for Spider-Man too,” Ned shouted from across the room.

“Big fan of yours,” MJ said from behind Peter, staring at Natasha. Peter had to hold back his impulse to jump up to the ceiling. Natasha smirked at his panicked reaction.

“Thank you. Are you the kid's girlfriend?”

Peter blushed such a violent pink that his skin almost matched the Hello Kitty pajama pants he was wearing. MJ just snorted, before the two teens spoke in almost-unison, “I don't swing that way,” “I don't swing that way.”

“Surprised JARVIS didn't try to tell me off for asking that question,” Natasha said.

“Я сказал JARVIS, что могу сам ответить на мои личные вопросы.” [*I told JARVIS to let me answer personal questions myself.*] Peter sighed. “Это долгая история.” [*It's a long story.*]

“Loki?” Natasha asked.

“Loki,” Peter confirmed.

“Kid. Kid. Kid.” Ned was chanting across the room, trying to get Peter’s attention.

“Why don’t you and your not-girlfriend get back to the museum. Looks like your friend wants to show you the Spider-Man exhibit.” Natasha grinned, sharp teeth showing. “Увидимся позже, маленький паук.” [*See you later, little spider.*]

“Bye N-N-Natasha,” Peter said. He nudged MJ’s shoulder and the two of them went to join Ned.

“Hey, lady,” Flash said, sidling up to Natasha as Peter walked away. “What’re you doing talking to Penis? He’s a total loser. But don’t worry, I’m willing to talk to you. My name’s Flash.”

Natasha looked down her nose at the boy. “Do you know who I am?”

“A hottie with a body?”

She pointed at the nearby glass case with her name and a large picture of her. At the same time, she withdrew a stiletto knife and held it under Flash’s neck. “Now, I repeat, do you know who I am?”

“Yes,” Flash squeaked.

“And—” she pointed towards Peter with the knife “—do you know who that is?”

“That’s Penis [BLEEP],” he mumbled.

“Wrong,” she said, bringing the knife back to Flash’s throat. “That is The Kid, and he is twice the man you will ever be, and if I ever see you harassing him or his weird little friends again, well. Our next talk won’t be as pleasant as this one.” She put her knife away and seemingly disappeared into the shadows.

Flash stumbled back to the exhibits, going up to the Black Widow’s first. Studying her face, so that the next time he wanted to make fun of Peter he could first make sure she wasn’t around.

Meanwhile, Natasha pulled out her cellphone and sent a text to Clint.

[Nat]

Keep an eye on the kid’s six. Bully named Flash.

[Barton]

batman-thumbs-up.gif

kitten-sneezing.gif

Sorry kitten meant for Barnes

[Nat]

You’re an idiot.

She closed her phone and exited the museum through a back door.

Peter and MJ met up with Ned, who was standing in front of the Spider-Man exhibit in awe. It was a lot smaller than the other Avengers’ cases, but then again Spider-Man had only been around for a year. A few news-clippings, including that horrible photo of Spider-Man exiting a port-o-potty with toilet paper attached to his shoe. His first suit—the red and blue sweats he’d colored himself with a black permanent marker. And a brief list of Spider-Man trivia, that Ned was reading out loud.

“His favorite sport is competitive speed walking. His favorite television show is 60 Minutes. His favorite ice cream flavor is freezer-burned vanilla. He is terrified of spiders.” Ned was sneaking looks at Peter’s face, trying not to snicker.

“Is Spider-Man my grandma?” MJ said.

“What the heck!” Peter whisper-shouted. “Those aren’t true at all. I mean, I’d assume they’re not true,” he said, blanching and looking at MJ.

“C’mon, kid, as if I hadn’t figured it out,” MJ said dispassionately, rolling her eyes. “Give me some credit, loser.”

“What—” Peter started, before shutting his mouth. Somehow it didn’t surprise him that MJ knew —she was, after all, quiet and observant. She probably knew more about most people at school than they knew themselves. And, other than Ned, there was no one he’d trust more with his secret identity than her. “Huh.”

“But really, speed walking? You’re such a nerd.” MJ turned and walked towards Pepper Potts’s display case. Even though the woman wasn’t an Avenger, the SI CEO definitely warranted her own display for her role in many of their missions.

“This is totally Tony’s fault,” Peter said as he took out his cellphone. “Ned, can I take a picture of you next to the case?”

“Um, duh,” Ned said, posing like the web-slinging superhero as Peter snapped a photo. “Send it to me?”

“Duh.”

After thirty more minutes, Krystle gathered the teens up again near the front door.

“Now, before we leave, you get to vote for your favorite Avenger. Each month, the Avengers hold a contest amongst themselves, in a way. Each of them picks their favorite charity, and whoever gets the most votes gets a large donation made in their name. At the voting booths, scan your card to get started. You can read more information about each Avenger’s selected charity and then make your selection.”

“Hey, there’s no Spider-Man here,” Flash said, sounding disappointed.

“Spider-Man isn’t an Avenger,” Peter said, walking up to a machine. Loki also wasn’t listed as an option but, to Peter’s surprise, Bucky was. Judging from the incredibly recent picture, it sounded like he’d only been made an official Avenger within the last month. Reviewing Bucky’s chosen charity—supporting PTSD treatment for veterans—Peter smiled as he selected the super soldier.

“Traitor,” a voice came from over his shoulder. Peter jumped and turned to see Tony standing behind him.

“You and I need to have a serious talk about the Spider-Man facts listed over there,” Peter grumbled. When the machine asked if he wanted to confirm his selection of Bucky, he said Yes.

“How is Iron Man not your favorite, Kid? After all I’ve done for you?”

The two of them tucked into an alcove so the class couldn’t see them.

“After telling the world that I’m afraid of spiders? Seriously?”

“Give me new facts and I’ll get it fixed tomorrow. I guessed on a lot of it.” Tony smirked, but had a slight hurt in his eyes.

“No, Mr. Stark, Bucky’s not my favorite Avenger. But I’m pretty sure this is his first time on the poll, and I don’t want him to come in last. Besides, my favorite Avenger wasn’t listed.”

“Would you really have voted for Spider-Man? I admire your ego, kid.”

“Nope, for Tony Stark.” Peter stuck his tongue out at his mentor. Sure, Iron Man was listed, but Peter preferred the actual man under the suit—his mentor, and friend.

“Okay, kid, you get to pick dinner for that one. Sap. Now get back to your class.” Tony made a shooing motion at the teen.

“Aren’t you here to pick me up?” Peter asked.

“Nah, looks like JARVIS and the team are doing a good job looking out for you. I can take you upstairs if you want, but you’ve been cooped up all week. I thought you’d want the chance to hang out with your friend—Ted, was it?”

“Ned. And thanks, Tony,” Peter said, going in for a hug.

“Nope,” his mentor said, putting a hand on Peter’s forehead to keep the kid from getting any closer. Tony grabbed the cereal bowl from Peter’s hand. “And put this on. Double-click the red button to send out a distress signal.” He handed Peter a pink Hello Kitty watch.

“Hey, I gotta ask, Tony. What’s with all the Hello Kitty stuff?”

“Happy told me it’s your favorite.” Ah, so it was from Happy reading Peter’s tumblr and confusing Hello Kitty with Chococat. But it still warmed Peter’s heart that both men remembered. “Do you not like it?”

“It’s perfect,” Peter said, smiling softly at his mentor. “Thank you.”

“Now, run along before they leave without you.”

handsome-hawkeye.gif

The class took one of the SI elevators up to the twelfth floor, which housed one of the building’s large cafeterias. This was one of the less-commonly used eating areas, since the R&D and corporate departments had their own on higher floors. Nonetheless, there was a giant dining room, and numerous food stations.

“Each of your ID cards has \$20 on it, which you can use for lunch,” Krystle said. “Anything beyond that must be covered by yourself. You have approximately a half-hour to eat.”

Ned, MJ, and Peter went to grab food. Peter hoped his ID card had money on it, since he didn’t have his wallet with him. He figured it would, since he had been planning on using it to buy coffee for Tony this morning, but worst-case scenario he knew Ned would be willing to lend him some cash.

Ned and MJ both got average amounts of food—MJ’s vegan and organic, Ned’s not quite as

healthy. Peter piled a tray high: salad, two bananas, pizza, burgers, pad thai, and an ice cream sundae. As they scanned out at a checkout counter, the machine repeated back their remaining balance. ‘Michelle Jones, \$14 remaining.’ ‘Ned Leeds, \$3 remaining.’ ‘The Kid, \$4,999,934 remaining.’

“What the [BLEEP],” Ned whispered.

“Did you just use my name in place of a swear word so JARVIS would censor it?” Peter asked, a little awestruck himself. Had Tony actually put five million dollars on his ID card balance?

“Smart,” MJ muttered, leading them to a table.

The three teens had barely sat down when Flash slid onto the bench across from Peter. “Sending a chick to fight your battles, Penis? Not very manly, but I guess I shouldn’t have expected more from you.”

“MJ?” Peter said, confused. Which battles had she been fighting for him?

“Not MJ, idiot. The Black Widow look-alike in the museum.”

“Yeah, that was the actual Black Widow, Eugene,” MJ said. She pulled out a heavy hardcover book and started reading, trying to ignore the others at the table.

“Bullshit,” Flash hissed.

“Watch your language, Biff Tannen,” Clint said as he came up behind Peter, holding his own tray. He sat next to Flash, eyeing the teenager with distaste.

“Who is Biff Tannen?” Flash asked, momentarily confused.

“Biff Tannen is the teenage bully in the Back to the Future series. He’s saying you’re a bully and that your material is dated. Nice double-burn, dude,” MJ said without inflection and without looking up, turning a page in her book.

“Who the hell are you?”

“Look at me when you talk to me,” Clint said, staring at Flash and tapping his hearing aids.

“Dude, no way. That’s Hawkeye.” Ned’s eyes got round. This was turning out to be the best day ever.

“Yeah right, as if they’d let a deaf dude be an Avenger,” Flash exaggerated his lips towards Clint.

Clint turned to Peter. ‘*Is this dickwad Flash?*’

Peter sighed, and signed back. ‘*Natasha tell you about him? Normally I’d tell you to back off, that I can take care of my own bullies. But if he’s going to insult the entire Deaf community, he’s all yours. Just remember he’s a minor, and I have to see him once I’m allowed to go back to school.*’

“Since when does [BLEEP] [BLEEP] know sign language?” Flash asked. “What the hell, Penis, you deaf too?”

Trying to ignore the fact that he’d just lip-read Peter’s real name off of Flash’s lips, Clint turned to the bully. “I’m disappointed in you, Eugene ‘Flash’ Thompson, of 463 E. Hamilton St. in Queens, son of Harrison and Joan Thompson.”

“How did you—”

“Know that you’re currently rocking a B-average in all your classes except math, which is hovering at a C+? Know that you only made the decathlon team as an alternate, and that was only because your father bought you a place at the table? Know that—”

“I don’t have to listen to this,” Flash yelled, grabbing his tray and walking away from the table. Clint slid over to take up the newly vacated spot across from Peter.

“Dude,” Ned said from next to Hawkeye, staring at the Avenger with wide eyes. “Dude.”

“Dude indeed,” Clint said, digging into his lunch.

“What the hackysack was that?” Peter asked.

Clint shrugged. “Nat did a bit of recon. You know how she gets.”

“Dude,” Ned said again. “You totally schooled him.”

“Yup,” Clint said. Signing at Peter, he said, ‘ *I saw your real name on his lips. Sorry about that.* ’

‘ *Oh. But you’re not going to tell anyone, so it’s okay, I guess. But for real, Clint, thank you.* ’

‘ *Just did what I’d want someone to do if it was one of my kids being picked on. Don’t mention it.* ’

‘ *You have kids?!* ’ Peter asked, surprised. For some reason, the Avengers had always seemed like family-less, social-life-less entities to him. It had been nice getting to know them this past week, learning their unique personalities.

“Give me your phone, kid,” Clint said to Peter, motioning his hand at the teenager’s StarkPhone lying on the table. Clint punched in his own number and sent a text to himself. Seconds later, Peter saw that he’d been added to a group chat.

[Group chat: MurderTriplets]

[Clint]

Hey kid

handsome-hawkeye.gif

This is Clint

[TheKid]

Hiiiiii XD

tired-sloth.gif

[Nat]

I hate you both.

[Clint]

:’(

[TheKid]

:’(

[Nat]

Ok I don’t hate The Kid anymore.

“Dude,” Ned said again.

“Shouldn’t you two be eating?” Clint said, motioning with his fork between Ned’s and Peter’s trays. MJ had already finished and pushed her tray away so that she could focus on her book.

“Right,” Peter said, starting with one of his bananas.

Even though Ned had seen Peter eat before, and knew that the other teenager was Spider-Man, he was still always impressed by how much food the boy could eat. Clint, having never seen it this closely, was amused. His kids weren’t old enough to have puberty-related growth spurts yet, but he wasn’t looking forward to it, especially if they ate this much. Maybe he should ask the Avengers for a raise.

Banned from Banner’s Lab

“This is very exciting, class. We’ve been invited up to the personal lab of Dr. Bruce Banner for a tour. I want to remind everyone of the rules we discussed earlier about behavior towards SI employees and the Avengers, because both of them apply in this scenario.”

Peter rolled his eyes as the tour got into the elevator and Krystle pressed the button for the 87th floor. He wasn’t sure who’d arranged this, but he knew that word of his bullying had already gotten around to the Avengers, and they were subtly assigning themselves to watch out over the tour.

Outside of Bruce’s lab, all the student swiped their cards again. Bruce looked up when he heard ‘The Kid’ announced.

“Hey, kid,” he said, waving awkwardly, the long sleeves of his lab coat slightly over his hands. “Good to see you again.”

“Hi Dr. Banner,” Peter said shyly. He was still in awe that Bruce Banner—one of the most influential geneticists of their generation—knew who he was.

“So, you must all be the kid’s decathlon team? Nice to meet you all. I’m Dr. Banner, and I’m on the gene-splicing and radiation research team here at Stark Industries. I’m—”

“How much did Penis pay you to pretend you know him?” Flash asked.

“Um, what?”

“How much. Did Penis. Pay you.”

“What the—what male genitalia—I—”

“The ‘kid.’ [BLEEP] [BLEEP]. Whatever you want to call him.”

Bruce’s eye started twitching, a light green pallor hitting his cheek.

“Flash, for the love of all that is holy, shut up,” Peter hissed. “You’re making him angry. You wouldn’t like him when he’s angry.”

“Oh yeah right, as if he’s gonna ‘Hulk out’ over a puny Penis like you,” Flash said, laughing.

One of Bruce's colleagues came up and took over the talk, motioning to Bruce to retire to a side room and pull himself together. "I am Dr. Selvig, head of our genetics research department. My personal lab is just across the hall. If you'll all follow me?" The doctor led the tour away, sending a worried glance towards Bruce.

Peter slipped away from the rest of them and went after Bruce. "Dr. Banner," he said cautiously. "Are you alright?"

"Call me Bruce, kid," the doctor said from the back room. Peter walked in to find him slumped against a wall, sitting on the ground. "That sure brought back a lot of memories."

"Were you bullied as a kid too?" Peter asked, sitting cross-legged on the floor next to Bruce.

Bruce let out a huff of air that was almost a laugh. "Yeah. Chubby little science nerd? Of course I was. Big-ass Bruce was a personal favorite."

"Guess you're lucky thicc is in," Peter said. At that, Bruce let out an actual laugh. "You want me to call anyone for you, Dr. B—Bruce? You're still looking a little green around the gills."

"Yeah, probably a good idea to get Nat down here."

Peter arched an eyebrow at the man—he'd never paid attention to the rumors of a relationship between Bruce and Natasha, especially since, as the only female Avenger, the misogynistic media tended to pair her with all of the others.

"No don't look at me like that, kid. No funny business. She's just really good at talking me down. You want to use my phone?" Bruce asked.

Shaking his head, Peter pulled out his StarkPhone.

[TheKid]

Can you come to 87th floor? Bruce looking a bit green

[Nat]

On my way.

What happened?

[TheKid]

Flash being flash, Bruce being protective

Situation deflated but come just in case?

By the time Natasha reached the 87th floor, Bruce was looking a bit better. Peter gave her a small smile and snuck into the other lab to rejoin his class. Except he'd forgotten that they'd all needed to swipe their ID badges to get in, and once he swiped his it announced his name—loudly. "The Kid, clearance level: all access."

"Sorry," he said, ducking his head.

"Where were you?" Mr. Harrington asked. "You can't go wandering around in—"

"Ah, so you are The Kid," Dr. Selvig said. "Bruce has spoken highly of you, as have several of the other interns."

"Come on!" Flash said from the back of the lab. "What the hell is going on here? Why is everyone pretending they know fucking Penis [BLEEP]? He's literally a piece of shit loser with no money,

no family, no friends except for tubby and sociopath over there. So why the f—”

A strong, metal hand clenched around Flash’s shoulder. The teen spun around to see Bucky—well, Bucky dressed in an SI security guard uniform.

Without trying to minimize his slight Russian accent (and maybe even playing it up), Bucky said, “We have received reports about your conduct, Mr. Thompson. Per the permission slip you signed, we will now be taking you to the security office for the remainder of the tour. Your teacher can retrieve you before they leave the premises.”

“What? You can’t—Mr. Harrington!” Flash shouted at the teacher, as the other teenagers looked stricken.

“Что делаешь?” [*What are you doing?*] Peter asked quietly.

“Просто порадуйтесь, это я, а не Tony.” [*Just be glad it’s me and not Tony.*]

As Bucky marched Flash towards the elevator bay, Peter spied a broad-shouldered man lurking in the shadows. He was wearing a ball cap and dark aviator glasses, trying to hide his face, but Peter recognized him.

“Mr. Captain America, sir,” he said quietly as he slid next to the man. “What are you and Bucky doing?”

“Call me Steve, kid,” he said, smiling at Peter. “And nothing the kid doesn’t deserve. You know, when I was your age, I was bullied relentlessly. I was small, weak, and sickly, and easy target. And it made me the man I am today—always fighting for the little guy. I’m assuming it’s the same for you.”

“He’s just a minor, Steve. Don’t hurt him.”

“You’re so much like your dad.”

“My what? Do you mean Tony? Oh cheese-on-crackers Tony isn’t my dad. I don’t know where all you guys come up with this. And I’m nothing like Tony! Not that he’s not awesome, but we’re incredibly different.”

“Even if you’re not his son, which I’m sorry for assuming, just, you know, Tony in the 90’s wasn’t exactly great with romantic relationships. But you’re very much like him. I don’t want to speak ill of the dead but Howard Stark... well. The Howard Stark I knew would not have been a good father. I can’t imagine how terrible a childhood Tony must have had. Even though Tony and I have had our differences, I know that his heart is in the right place,” Steve said. “And if Tony had been raised with even a fraction of the love and affection you clearly have, he would have been a lot like you.”

Peter blinked away tears. “You’re just trying to distract me from the fact that the Winter Soldier is probably torturing my high school bully, aren’t you.”

“Is it working?” Steve laughed. “No, what we have planned for your Flash is much more devious and enjoyable—for us. Give me your telephone.” Steve sent himself a text from Peter’s phone. “I’ll send you footage. You can’t put it on the internets or YouTubes or anything, but you’ll enjoy it.”

Steve took the next elevator down, presumably to reunite with Bucky and Flash, wherever they were. Peter returned to the tour, hoping he hadn’t missed too much. He felt his StarkPhone vibrate in his pocket, and saw that he’d been added to another group chat.

[H8Bully: Cap]

Hey Kid. Creating a group texting chat with you and Bucky. Did I do it right? I asked JARVIS to help, because telephones are so complicated nowadays. Can you hear me?

[H8Bully: Buck]

Affirmative.

kitten-waving.gif

[H8Bully: TheKid]

kitten-tickle.gif

[H8Bully: Cap]

How do I send tiny movies?

Real-Life PSA

Bucky led Flash back to the third-floor conference room the tour had been in earlier. He sat the boy in a chair facing a large TV screen on the wall, and stood back.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing, freak? I’ll sue you. Do you even know who my father is? I—”

“Shut up,” Bucky said tersely.

The TV screen flickered to life, the familiar image of a Captain America PSA coming on the screen. Wearing the bright-blue show costume, sitting backwards on a chair trying to look casual, Steve wrung his hands above the chair’s back.

“Seriously? A Captain America PSA? This place is pathetic. As if it’s my fault for trying to point out what a freaking liar that loser Penis [BLEEP] is—”

“So you’re a high school bully,” the Captain America PSA began. “Maybe you think picking on someone smarter than you will somehow make you feel better about your poor grades. Maybe you recently got a 70% on an exam, and your victim set the curve with his 98%. Maybe your victim made it on the academic decathlon team while you scraped by to get a place as the team alternate.”

“What—”

“Or maybe you’re upset that your victim has good friends, who care about his well-being and are supportive, whereas your own friends stay with you only because you’re wealthy and popular, and you know they’d leave you the minute your social status changed.

“Or perhaps you’ve started coming to the realization that, although your parents have showered you in money and possessions, they’re emotionally withholding. So you take your abandonment issues out on others in the hope it’ll somehow make you feel better about yourself.

“Maybe your life isn’t ideal, but that fact that you turn around and hurt someone else is not acceptable.

“Do you think this sort of behavior will be tolerated in college? In graduate school? In the workplace? At Stark Industries, for example, there is a strong anti-bullying culture. Calling a

colleague a negative nickname such as ‘Penis’ or making fun of someone’s family status or spreading lies about their employment status is grounds for termination. In fact, there are legal punishments for these acts of harassment and slander.”

“What the fu—”

“And just because you’re in high school doesn’t mean this behavior should be tolerated. You’re only setting yourself up for failure in the future.”

“Shut up, grandpa,” Flash yelled at the screen.

“Now, I know what you’re thinking. ‘Shut up, grandpa,’ am I right?” The TV-screen Steve chuckled. “Even trying to bully one of the Avengers. But think about it. You’re in the Stark Industries’ version of detention. You were caught harassing one of their top interns and personal friend of the Avengers, most likely. And we know your name, your high school, and your grades. Tony Stark is one of the wealthiest men in the world, and has ties to every major university in the country. With just a phone call, he could blacklist you from everywhere. Your safety schools wouldn’t even consider you. Your future—” Steve snapped “—would be over.”

“No—”

“Oh, yes, bully. Whereas your bullying victim? No black marks on his record. With his grades and recommendations from the Avengers? He can get into any university he wants. Heck, he’ll likely get a full-ride scholarship. And some day, when you’re trying to get an entry-level job at the corporation he owns? You had better hope that kid has more mercy for you than you did.”

The lights behind the Captain America on the screen dimmed, his face highlighted only. “Do you hear what I’m saying, Flash?”

The TV went black. Flash’s eyes widened and he looked around, only to see that the security guard who’d brought him in was no longer there. He tried the door, but it was locked, and wouldn’t open with his ID card. The TV flickered back on, and a music video began, and it played on loop:

“We’re no strangers to love, you know the rules, and so do I....”

[Group chat: HateBullies]

[Buck]

Here is video. Nat us some intel.

flash.mp4

[Cap]

Bucky claims this is something called rick rolling? I don’t know what it means but it’s pretty annoying.

I’m still miffed you introduced the rest of the Avengers to the PSAs. But it’s nice to put them to good use.

[TheKid changed the name of the group chat to RickRoll]

[TheKid]

ded

Ur not really gonna blacklist him tho
Right?

[Buck]

obama-maybe-its-classified.gif

[TheKid]

No

Bad bucky

He's an ass but doesn't deserve that

Pls

Bucky

Hey

[Cap]

No we're not planning on actually blacklisting him. Just wanted to scare him a bit.

[Buck]

FINE.

Peter Parker's Panic Prison

“...So with the harmful effects of the radiation negated,” Dr. Selvig was saying, “we can—”

He was interrupted by a loud siren going off, and a flashing red light on the ceiling.

“Attention Stark Industries employees. The building has been breached. Evacuation protocol B initiated. Shelter in place until the elevator opens on your floor.” JARVIS’s voice rang through the lab. The tour group began to scream, while the scientists paled but rushed to ensure their experiments were in a safe condition to leave for a few hours.

Peter was already whipping out his StarkPhone to call Tony as it rang.

“Hey underoos. Get up to the penthouse. HYDRA’s in the building.”

“I’m still with the tour group. What are they supposed to do? If it helps, Nat, Bruce, and Clint are here with us on the 87th floor.” Peter could hear cursing from the vents, where Clint had been certain he hadn’t been spotted.

“Protocol B includes Banner locking himself in the lab’s Hulk-proof room. He doesn’t have a great track record at not destroying everything in the building when it’s on lockdown. But Natasha and Clint, you say? Hm.” Tony paused. “Take your class down to your lab, the blue door in the back is a panic room. Password is ‘save me, Obi Wan.’ Just make sure Karen hides everything confidential before you get them in there.”

“Okay, I can do that. Are you and Pepper safe? Where are the rest of the Avengers?”

Tony sighed. The kid was in danger, and he still wanted to make sure the rest of the team was safe. “Thor and Loki still in Asgard, presumably, since JARVIS can’t get ahold of them. Steve and Barnes are helping clear the public floors. Pepper’s locked in with the board; they’re not evacuating but they’re safe. I’m putting on the suit and going to kick some HYDRA ass. I don’t know where the hell S.H.I.E.L.D. is.”

“Right. Stay safe?”

“Back at you, underoos.” Tony hung up.

Peter went up to Krystle. “Hey, I just talked to Mr. Stark, and we’re taking the tour to the 85th floor. There’s a panic room we can use.”

The tour guide looked relieved. “But we have to wait for our turn with the elevator—” she started, but was interrupted by the Avengers’ private elevator opening in front of them.

“Midtown tour, please come with me,” JARVIS said from the elevator’s interior.

“Thanks, JARVIS,” Peter said, helping Krystle usher the teenagers and Mr. Harrington inside. It was a tight fit, as was the small lobby of the 85th floor.

Peter scanned his ID badge, handprint, and irises as he spoke to Karen. “Lock down anything confidential,” he said. “Bringing in civilians.”

“Okay, Kid. JARVIS has already discussed the situation with me. Do you want to turn on JARVIS’s monitoring in the lab?” Karen asked.

With surprise, Peter said “Yes.” He’d assumed that JARVIS already had eyes and ears on in the lab. He was pleased that Tony had considered his privacy in such a substantial way. Whispering “underoos,” the door slid open.

Almost all of the glass cases had been turned opaque, and metal boxes covered the workstations. None of the Avengers tech was visible, and Peter sighed in relief. It was enough that the students now believed him about his internship, he didn’t want them to know what he’d be working on. He was just grateful none of them seemed to have realized that this was his private lab—entire floor—of SI.

Leading the tour group, Nat, and Clint over to the blue door, he swiped his card and scanned his iris again, whispering the new password: “Help me, Obi Wan.” The door slid open, revealing a decent-sized room with plush couches lining the walls. Thankfully, it looked large enough to fit the entire group.

As the teenagers filtered in, Peter spoke to Karen. “Is May okay?”

“Your roommate is safe,” Karen said. “Mr. Hogan is with her and reports no attempts on their location.”

That was good. “Were Steve and Bucky able to get Flash out?”

“Captain Rogers and Mr. Barnes have evacuated most of the public floors but there appears to be rubble in front of the door to the conference room you are referring to. The soldiers have been enlisted by Mr. Stark to keep HYDRA away from the elevator bays so that the employees may safely exit the building. The rubble is too heavy for them to lift, but it might be movable by a stronger party, such as by Spider-Man.” Karen’s lilt let him know what she was suggesting.

Natasha had heard, and flashed her eyes towards Peter. The class and other adults were already in the panic room, and she was just holding the door open until he finished talking with Karen.

“Kid, no,” she said.

“I can’t just leave him there.”

“Then Clint and I are coming with you.”

“No. I need you to look after my class. Please, Nat.”

“Он хулиган. Он будет в порядке, оставь его там.” [*He is a bully. He'll be fine, leave him there.*]

“Он, вероятно, в ужасе.” [*He's probably terrified.*] “Nat—”

“You’re a good kid,” she sighed. “Возьми свой костюм и возвращайся сюда, как только спасешь ребенка.” [*Grab your suit, and get back here the moment you save the kid.*]

“Will do.” Peter grinned as she walked into the safe room, shutting the door behind her.

Then he remembered that his suit had been cut to shreds after his run-in last week with HYDRA, and that at least one of his web shooters had been smashed. He asked Karen to show him the lab’s station that held the Spider-Man tech, and he was heartbroken. Scraps of suit, two broken web shooters, and his fried mask faced him. In a drawer, he found one of his old models of web shooters—not cool enough to make his display in the Avengers’ museum. They still had a little web fluid left in them, so he strapped them on. He put an ear comm in.

“Karen, can you hear me?”

“Yes, Peter,” she said into his ear. “It’s certainly nice to use your name again.”

“You and me both,” he said, heading for the elevator. “JARVIS, take me to the third floor.”

“Boss has forbidden me from allowing you to exit this floor,” JARVIS said, sounding apologetic.

“JARVIS, there are people in danger. If Tony thinks I’m going to stay here while one of my classmates is stranded, then he doesn’t know me very well,” Peter yelled at the closed elevator doors.

“That’s where you’re wrong, underoos.” Tony’s voice came through the speaker. “I know you too well. Self-sacrificing idiot, even trying to sa—” A large crash boomed.

“Tony? Tony!” Peter yelled.

“It appears the Boss has sustained some damage,” JARVIS admitted.

“Override it. Now, JARVIS. I know there’s got to be a protocol or weird pop-culture reference password I can use to get you going. Now what the frack is it?” Peter was on the verge of tears. It wasn’t enough that his mentor was injured (just an injury, just an injury, he reminded himself). He wanted to get Flash out of there. The other teenager was in this situation because of Peter, and he felt guilty.

After a momentary pause, JARVIS said, “Initiating ‘I’m a big boy now’ protocol.” The elevator doors slid open. Peter hopped in and was whooshed down to the now-vacant third floor. He remembered where the conference room they’d been in that morning was, and he rushed in that direction.

A mangled mess of metal was blocking the doors, and apparently had also broken the door’s key access pad. Peter could hear Flash shouting on the other side, pounding against the door to be let out. With a sigh, Peter wiped his sweaty hands on his fuzzy pink pants and began hauling the metal away from the door.

“Stand back,” he shouted once the space in front of the door was cleared. Without the key access

active, he'd have to try to rip the door off. Peter had never tested his strength—he wasn't the sort who needed to boast about how much he could lift—but it was definitely enough to pick up semi trucks. Chances were good that it would be enough to get the door off.

“Penis?” a small, scared voice came from the other side of the door.

“Back up,” Peter repeated.

He slammed his hands to the sides of the door frames, punching through the reinforced walls. A scream echoed from the other side, but he ignored it. Peter grasped the sides of the door and wrencheded backwards. An explosion of wood and metal showered him, but the door was removed.

Peter stood up and brushed himself off, using his web shooters to clear the area of debris, before looking at Flash's shocked expression. “Come on.”

“Spider-Man?” Flash whispered.

With hardened eyes, Peter motioned for the other teen to follow him, and they trotted towards the elevator. JARVIS opened the doors and Peter practically pushed Flash in front of him.

Which was fortunate, because at that moment, Peter felt a sharp sting on the side of his neck. A needle, plunging cool liquid into his bloodstream. Poison? No, a sedative. The room began to blur, and the elevator doors quickly shut, leaving Flash alone inside the elevator.

“Get him to safety,” Peter slurred at Karen, right before the ear comm was removed and crunched under the boot of the HYDRA agent who'd caught him. Then, everything went dark.

HYDRA Sucks

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

HYDRA Sucks

JARVIS had gotten Flash up to the 85th floor, and the teenager had been stranded in the vestibule for two hours before a SI security team came to rescue him. It took the team, JARVIS, and Tony two more hours to get into Peter's lab and then into the panic room. Even with Karen's helpful overrides, most of the security was tied to Peter's biometrics and the very code had to be rewritten to rescue Nat, Clint, and the tour.

After the teenagers had been bussed back to Midtown where their concerned parents and guardians were waiting, with an additional security team accompanying Flash home to go over the terms of his NDA, the Avengers and two of the top S.H.I.E.L.D. agents gathered in the penthouse common room.

Thor and Loki had arrived back from Asgard as the security team was cleaning up—Thor looked like he might cry, and Loki looked like he might murder. Clint looked pissed at Natasha, and Natasha looked pissed at herself. Steve looked angry, but Bucky looked rabid. Bruce looked sad and scared, as did Pepper. S.H.I.E.L.D. agents Maria Hill and Nick Fury looked frustrated.

But Tony... Tony's face was a blank mask. The mask he put on when he was in pain.

The elevator door dinged and JARVIS announced, “Mrs. Parker to see you.”

Tony turned towards the elevator, where a weepy May Parker was being trailed by Happy. “May —” he began, but was interrupted when she slapped Tony across the face. “I deserve that. I deserve worse than that.”

“I left him in your care,” she whispered, “because I trusted you to keep him safe.”

“We’ll get him back, May. I promise.” Pepper had stood and was now rubbing the other woman’s back. She echoed herself, “we’ll get him back.”

With a cast around his wrist, sling supporting his previously dislocated shoulder, and bruises mottling his face, Tony was easily the most banged-up of the Avengers. Steve and Bucky had some cuts and bruises, but their increased healing speed meant that the cuts were already starting to scab over, and the bruises were turning yellow.

Tony grabbed a bottle of water with his good hand and sat down on the couch with a sigh, struggling to get the top off. “So who here knows the kid’s real identity already?”

Bruce is starting to awkwardly raise his hand when Natasha cuts in. “Which one?”

“Shit, Nat, how did you—”

“Super spy, remember?”

“Ok. Then who here knows the kid’s real name?”

Bruce and Pepper, May and Happy, and Natasha and Clint all raise their hands. S.H.I.E.L.D. agents

Hill and Fury do as well.

“And who knows the kid’s other identity?” Tony asks.

Pepper, Bruce, Happy, May, and Natasha raise their hands. Clint looks at his partner, betrayed.

“Where is the asset?” Bucky asked, glaring at Tony. “And how did HYDRA get him out of the building?”

“First things first,” Agent Fury said. Tony hadn’t wanted to give Peter’s name and identity as Spider-Man to S.H.I.E.L.D., didn’t want to get the kid put into one of their databases. So he’d worked with Fury and Hill as mediators, making sure no one else at the organization knew the kid’s name. And the agents had gone along with it, if only because Peter was a minor. “What we’re about to say doesn’t leave this room.”

“Obviously, Agent pirate,” Thor said. “Get on with it.”

“Peter Benjamin Parker, age 15, sophomore at Midtown School of Science and Technology, intern at Stark Industries, and alter-ego of the mutate Spider-Man. Kidnapped today at 3:07 pm from the Avengers Tower by agents from HYDRA.”

“Our brother has a name,” Thor said softly.

“Our brother is Spider-Man?” Loki said, raising an eyebrow at Agent Fury. “The superhero vigilante?”

“Yes,” Natasha said. “And I’m assuming that’s why HYDRA is after him. They probably want to figure out how his DNA mutated or something, and they’re too chicken-shit to go after Steve or Bruce.”

“Makes sense,” Bruce said, “but how did they find him? How did they know who he was?”

“I can answer that one,” Agent Hill said. “Late last year, Spider-Man was instrumental in bringing a villain named the Vulture to justice. Unfortunately for Peter, the Vulture was actually Adrian Toomes, the father of Peter’s date to the homecoming dance. Meaning that Toomes is one of the only people outside of this room to know that Peter is Spider-Man.”

“Then how did HYDRA find out?” Tony asked.

“Toomes was stabbed in prison a few weeks ago and transferred to a cushy white-collar facility. We believe that HYDRA set up the transfer in exchange for information.”

“Do you know where they took Peter?”

“We tracked a van that came to visit Toomes to a black site upstate,” Agent Fury said. “We believe that’s where they’re keeping the kid. We’re moving in at 0500, and you understand that, because of the Accords, the Avengers cannot be there.”

“Fine, whatever. Send me the coordinates anyway. The two of you are excused now, JARVIS will escort you to the lobby.” Tony knew he was being snippy towards the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, but he was not their biggest fan at the moment. After all, they hadn’t been much help when HYDRA was breaking into the Avengers’ Tower. “Happy, take May home. We’ll contact you with updates as soon as we know anything. Pepper—”

“Heading to my office to rearrange your meetings for the next week,” she said, anticipating his

order and scurrying out of the room.

“The rest of you, meet in the war room in an hour.”

Avengers, Assemble

“Alright, everyone. Five minutes for questions and blame, and then we make a plan,” Tony said, striding into the war room. Everyone else was already assembled. Clint and Nat had proactively geared up, dressed (and armed) as Hawkeye and the Black Widow.

“He’s fifteen.” Steve looked shocked.

“Yep,” Tony said.

“You brought him to Berlin. A fifteen-year-old. I threw part of an airport at a fifteen-year-old.”

“To be fair, you were pulling your punches. We all were. And he’s fifteen now. Berlin was over a year ago.”

“Shit,” Steve said.

“Language,” Tony quipped, though it was tinged with his own anger—whether towards himself, the other Avengers, or HYDRA wasn’t clear.

“Not the time for your jokes, Anthony,” Loki hissed. “You were willing put the kid in danger, in the middle of your stupid little civil war. You equipped a child with high-tech gear and brought him into battle with—and against—the Avengers. What were you thinking?”

“I wasn’t.” Tony slammed his good fist on the table. The others could see the unshed tears in his eyes, the twitching vein on his forehead, the dark circles hiding under his bruised eyes. Peter’s kidnapping was hitting the inventor harder than they’d realized. “I wasn’t,” he repeated. “That’s on me. I brought him into this life, into an Avengers-adjacent position. It’s my fault.”

“He was Spider-Man before you recruited him,” Natasha said. “I’ve read the bio in the museum, seen the suit he was wearing before. Your upgraded suit probably saved his life many times over.”

“You have no right to talk, Nat,” Clint spat at her. “Why the hell did you let him go?”

“Because the kid’s a superhero. No, he’s an actual hero. He’s better than me, better than all of us,” she said quietly. “You really think he’d be okay locked away safely when there was someone who needed him to rescue them? I knew he was Spider-Man, and that he could grab his suit and weapons from the lab before heading out. He’s a smart kid, and I trusted him when I shouldn’t have.”

“He didn’t have a suit.” Bruce spoke up, clearing a tickle in his throat. “His suit and mask were damaged the first time HYDRA tried to take him. His web shooters too.”

“What?” Natasha blanched. She hadn’t realized Peter had gone down to save Flash unsuited and unarmed.

“Why didn’t he take your weapons?” Bucky asked, accent thick with snot. The super soldier had clearly cried during their hour-long break, and he wasn’t ashamed to show it. “His lab was full of

Avengers tech—including your knives and widow bites. Heck, a couple of my guns were there. Why did he go down unarmed?"

"Don't be stupid," Loki said. He leaned on his brother for support. "Have you met Peter? Seen how he fights as Spider-Man? I've seen videos online. He doesn't use lethal weapons, and he'd never use lethal weapons. He incapacitates bad guys, but as little as possible."

"He saved that vulture bird-man who tried to kill him," Thor said, voice wavering.

"Yeah, we get it, he's better than all of us." Tony sighed and sat down. A beeper on his watch went off—their five minutes of blame was over. "Enough with the pity party. Now, what do we do?"

"You get the coordinates from Hill? We can—"

"Not happening," Tony said. "If S.H.I.E.L.D. is going in, we need to trust them. We just got the Accords mess settled. And I trust Hill and Fury, even if I don't particularly like them."

"They're okay," Clint confirmed.

"But now, we need—" Tony was interrupted by JARVIS.

"Boss, a live video feed is coming in. It appears to be from HYDRA."

"Trace it and put it up on the screen," Tony said.

"It's untraceable, the signal bouncing around too frequently. But sending video and audio through now." JARVIS pulled the video onto the large projection screen in the room. All the Avengers turned to stare at the picture they were seeing.

It was Peter, strapped to a chair in a dimly-lit room, a bare light bulb hanging over his head. IVs of clear fluid went into both arms, and sensors had been hooked up to his temples and the sides of his neck. There was blood smeared across his face, under his nose and mouth, a dull red stain blossoming around the neck of his Stark Expo t-shirt. His nose was at an unfortunate angle, broken in at least two spots. Bruce winced—with Peter's accelerated healing factor, it had likely already healed into the new position. They would need to re-break it if—no, when, he reminded himself—the teen was safe. Peter's head lolled to the side, and the kid was unconscious.

"Wake up, spider boy," a cruel voice behind the camera said. When Peter didn't move, the man threw a bucket of water on him.

Slowly—too slowly for how cold the water must have been—Peter cracked open his eyes. They were glazed over, glassy. Bucky grimaced, recognizing the effects of the sedative HYDRA must have given him. He'd been on the receiving end of that mixture enough times when he was brainwashed by the organization.

"There he is," the voice said. A man dressed in a green leather suit with yellow straps walked into the scene. It wasn't the disembodied voice, since it continued to talk from off-screen. "Have him face the camera."

The unspeaking HYDRA agent stood behind Peter and grabbed the teen's hair, wrenching his head up to face the camera. "T'ny?" Peter asked, groggily.

"Tony is watching," the voice said.

Tony could hear the smirk in the tone, and he clenched his unbroken fist. Around him, he could see reactions from the other Avengers. Bruce had a hand covering his mouth in terror. Loki and Bucky were cold and looked murderous. Clint looked sad, likely thinking of his own children. Steve looked aghast, as did Thor. And Natasha was digging her pink nails into her palms so hard that thin rivulets of blood rolled down her fingers.

“Is T’ny comin’?” Peter asked, slurring his words. He smiled hopefully, showing pink teeth stained with blood. “T’ny ‘s comin’.”

“No, spider boy. Tony isn’t coming. No one is coming for you. And nobody will be coming for you. Do you know why?” The cruel voice didn’t wait for a response. “Because they know that if they try, you’ll be hurt. Hurt worse than you’ll be otherwise, I mean.”

The Avengers heard a small click and saw Peter’s body spasm for a few seconds, the HYDRA agent’s grip on his hair the only thing keeping the boy’s head from lolling back again.

“Now, Stark, we don’t want to make this hurt for Peter any more than absolutely necessary. We just want to synthesize his DNA to make more little super soldiers. Heck, we’ll even release him once we have a working formula, though that’s probably quite a few years down the line. But know this, Avengers. You make one move on us, we make it hurt. Now, because I am a generous man, I’ll even give the spider boy a minute to say his goodbyes. Peter?”

“Yeah?” the teen mumbled, still feeling some after twitches from the electrical pulse that had been sent through his body less than a minute earlier.

“Do you want to say goodbye to Tony?” The cruel voice was taunting, almost as if talking to a small child.

Peter nodded, and the agent let go of the teen’s hair. “T’ny. I’m sorry.” Tony sighed, heartbroken. Of course the kid’s words were going to be an apology. Peter continued, “I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you, and I’m sorry I made you worry. They broke my StarkPhone and ID badge, so I’m sorry about that too. And Mr. Stark,” Peter said seriously, looking at the camera with glassy eyes. “I’m sorry for keeping you up so late, though I don’t really know what time it is. I tried to check my watch but my hands were tied behind my back, so I just mashed all the buttons. They took it away from me, but it’s on the table there. It’s late, isn’t it? I’m sorry it’s so late.”

“Oh Peter, you beautiful baby genius,” Tony whispered under his breath, running to his keyboard.

“That’s enough, spider boy,” the cruel voice on the screen said. “Now say goodbye to Tony, because you’re never going to see him again.”

“Goodbye, T’ny,” Peter said, nodding off again. His brief boost of energy when sending the message to Tony was already wearing off. “I miss you.”

The video feed cut off, but Tony was still facing a computer screen, fingers flying across the keyboard.

“Tony?” Bruce asked.

“The watch. The kid’s watch. It’s got a tracker in it.” He was pulling up a map. “He wasn’t able to hit the panic button sequence, so it didn’t send an alert to me, but maybe—yes.”

On the map was a blinking green dot, hovering in rural Pennsylvania. Peter had somehow managed to at least turn the watch’s GPS tracker on. Tony had been kicking himself for not activating it permanently, but he had wanted to give the teenager the right of privacy.

“That’s not the location S.H.I.E.L.D. is going to.” Steve stepped closer to the map.

“No it is not,” Tony agreed. “That’s the location we’re going to.”

“But the Accords—” Bruce started.

“—don’t apply here,” Tony finished for him. “I’m not going as Iron Man, member of the Avengers. I’m going as Tony Stark, concerned employer and mentor, who just so happens to have a bad-ass robotic suit I can wear.”

“Ah, very good,” Thor said. “Then I shall go as Edna, the barmaid from the 24-hour tavern called IHOP down the street, who just so happens to have a magical hammer.”

“That’s not how this works, Point Break. But bonus points for trying.”

Whining, Wit, and a Wee Bit o’ Whump

“I’m bored,” Peter whined. None of the HYDRA agents in the sterile room looked at him. He was still strapped to a chair, and was hooked up to a twisted mockery of a dialysis machine. “Seriously, can’t you turn on Netflix or something?”

A resounding slap echoes through the near-silent lab, jarring Peter’s still-sensitive nose. The HYDRA agent who struck him proceeded to check that the diodes were still adhered properly to Peter’s temples. At the sound, the scarred man who’d been behind the camera earlier looked up but made no move to discipline the agent.

“Don’t damage the goods,” Peter quipped.

The teen’s eyes widened as the agent grabbed a pair of clippers and turned them on. He quickly realized that the agent planned on shaving part of his head so that they could attach additional diodes. He pouted as chunks of his baby-soft curls tumbled to the concrete floor. From the cool patches on his scalp, he figured that there were four small shaved sections, completely asymmetrical.

“You could have at least given me a cool mohawk or something, you know? Now I just look like that awkward kid in grade school who got gum stuck in his hair and they had to cut it out. I don’t remember his name. Maybe Josh? Juice? Is Juice a name? Anyway, one day I came home from school and told my aunt that when Juice grew up he was going to be a pirate. Or a criminal. I wonder what happened to him. Hey, you’re a criminal. Are you Juice?”

The agent slapped Peter again, but another agent sniggered in the distance. The agent tormenting Peter spun around and pulled out a gun, shooting the other agent in the knee.

“Shut up, all of you,” the man in charge said, not looking up from his computer. The man, who’d been the one speaking in the video, was broad shouldered and scarred across his face. He was wearing a white lab coat, pristine and crisp, and peering at the screen from behind blue-tinted glasses. “You’re here to take measurements and readings from the subject, not listen to him, and definitely not to shoot your coworkers in their knees.”

“Can I shoot the boy in the knee, then?”

“Are you kidding?” Peter squeaked. “You can’t damage the goods. I mean, what if Dr. Evil over there wants to run tests on me, test my endurance and skills and stuff? It’s not like I can run on a treadmill with weird diodes and stuff attached to me if I can’t even walk.”

“Maybe I just want to test your healing abilities,” the agent said, sneering.

“Later,” the man in charge said. “If the subject doesn’t shut up, you have my permission to gag him.”

Peter swallowed deeply. “I’ll be good,” he said quietly. “Won’t say anything else, promise. Starting now.”

The agent smiled, cold eyes boring into Peter’s. He placed the barrel of his gun—still warm—against the teen’s kneecap. “Good boy.”

It took a lot of willpower for Peter to not respond to that, but he settled for rolling his eyes. He was glad, however, that the man wouldn’t be shooting him in the knee—yet. Peter just hoped that the Avengers would come before it got to the point where the HYDRA agents wanted to run tests on his healing factor.

Time passed—hours, or minutes, it became hard for Peter to tell. The agents took readings of his heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, and reaction times. They attached and detached diodes, switched out his IVs, and poked and prodded him.

But Peter was starting to get a headache. He hadn’t eaten in too long, the flickering light bulb above his head was painful to his eyes, the soft beeps of the various machines he was plugged into was too repetitive. He was heading for a sensory overload, and fast.

“Please,” Peter started. “Mr. Evil HYDRA Agent Man?” He looked at the agent closest to him, and then towards the man in charge, still hovering over his own computer. “I need—”

A smaller HYDRA agent slapped his face, shutting him up. “No speaking,” she said, checking to make sure the slap hadn’t dislodged any of the diodes on his head.

The physical pain sent Peter over the edge, falling into a sensory nightmare. He hunched over, a loud, high-pitched whine escaping his lips involuntarily. He screwed his eyes shut and tried to move his hands over his ears, jerking against the restraints. Breaths came quicker, the beeps of the heart rate monitor picked up.

“No, no, no, no, no,” he chanted. “No, stop, make it stop.”

“What did you do?” the man in charge shouted at the small HYDRA agent. The sound seemed to boom and echo around the room, and Peter hunched further into his shoulders.

“I didn’t do anything,” she huffed. “Subject seems to be in sensory distress.”

“So there are downsides to his power,” the man in charge said, standing and heading over towards Peter. He peered at the teenager curiously. With a firm grip, he wrenched Peter’s head up to face him. “Look at me.”

Peter struggled to open his eyes, panting. He looked at the man in charge, sight blurry. “Make it stop.”

“Sedate him and put him in the isolation room,” the man in charge said. “We’ll pick up again tomorrow.”

“Yes, boss,” the woman said. Peter felt a sharp pinch in his neck, and the pull of diodes being removed from his neck and patchy scalp. As the IVs were being slowly pulled out of his veins, he lost consciousness.

A Different Sort of Field Trip

They'd parked the Quinjet three miles away from the giant compound Peter's signal was originating from. The plane had been cloaked the entire trip, and it remained invisible in the large, untamed field they'd left it in.

Which meant that they needed to trek the three miles down rural, poorly paved roads. They kept to the treeline—after all, the eight-man team wasn't exactly inconspicuous, with their battle uniforms and strapped-on weapons.

Well, Bruce was inconspicuous. Instead of a uniform or weapons, he wore a backpack laden with medical supplies. His objections—"I'm not that kind of a doctor, Tony"—had been largely ignored. And the team had unanimously decided that, due to the Hulk's... unpredictable nature, it would be better if he stayed outside unless there was an emergency. Bruce hadn't fought them on that point.

“What’s our ETA?” Clint asked (for the third time).

“For a former S.H.I.E.L.D. assassin and sniper, you sure are an impatient little man, aren’t you, Katniss,” Loki said. Natasha snickered, impressed both at the alien god’s cheek and the fact that he actually knew what the Hunger Games was.

“I thought the archer man was named Clint,” Thor said, confused.

“It is,” Clint said. “Your brother’s just being an ass.”

“Ah, that makes quite a bit more sense.”

“How about some silence from the peanut gallery?” Tony asked, scowling. His broken wrist was throbbing, even as it was stabilized in an air cast.

“They’re just blowing off some steam,” Steve said quietly, touching the bicep of Tony’s injured arm. “I’ve seen it before, in rescue missions during World War II.”

“I can’t believe HYDRA is still around,” Bucky said, having silently approached Steve and Tony. “Nearly 80 years later, still up to the same shit.”

“Language,” Steve said half-heartedly.

Bucky glared at him. “Was everything we did in the war pointless?”

Neither Steve nor Tony was surprised by the formerly brainwashed HYDRA assassin’s anger. Being unwillingly used as a killing machine by an evil organization tended to have that effect on people.

“Cut off one head and three more appear,” Tony said solemnly.

“Just like the real hydra,” Thor said, startling the trio’s quiet conversation. “She sheds them when she so desired, but I have never seen her with less than three.”

“Then we’ll just have to help this HYDRA shed one of its heads,” Steve said.

Natasha, leading the party, held up a fist to silent and stop the group. She pointed at a pasture to their right. “Horses,” she whispered, a ghost of a smile on her face.

Tony nodded sagely. He understood her—he’d similarly been deprived a traditional childhood. Natasha’s upbringing had been filled with weapons and assassination, with no time for childish obsessions like horses, team sports, or even friends. Tony had grown up in front of cameras, with high expectations placed on his shoulders because of his brilliance.

“Um, guys?” Bruce said tentatively. “I think we’re there.”

In the other direction from the pasture Natasha had pointed out, a sprawling concrete building rose from the tall grass. It was only a single floor, but tall smokestacks came from its roof in an unidentifiable pattern. It was a former meat-packing plant, and its large warehouse and smaller sub-zero walk-in rooms were likely what had attracted HYDRA.

Close to the outside of the tall chain-link fence circling the factory, behind a cluster of bushes, they crouched down. They’d been divided on whether to charge in, guns blazing, or to wait until nightfall and silently infiltrate the compound. The Avengers had worried that Peter could get caught in the cross-fire, or be used as leverage. With three former assassins on the team—Natasha, Bucky, and Clint—infiltration won out.

Of course, they all were still unhappy with aspects of the plan. It was mid morning by the time they’d arrived, which meant that they were sentencing Peter to an additional 12 hours until nightfall. But the knowledge that HYDRA wouldn’t want Peter harmed—at least, not yet—made the idea slightly more palatable.

With a nod, Clint and Natasha headed in opposite directions. They would circle the perimeter, finding weak points, identifying security patterns, and locating surveillance equipment.

Tony was sending out a fleet of tiny drones, cloaked against HYDRA’s potential airspace tracking technology. He was glued to a tablet screen, as each drone reported back on heat signatures. However, the building’s thick concrete roof and walls were making it difficult to get a read on how many HYDRA agents were in the building.

Bucky plopped down on the rocky ground, crossing his legs underneath himself. Loki fell on the ground next to the super soldier dramatically, lying on his back with an arm flung across his face against the bright sun. Bucky looked at the god with a scowl and a raised eyebrow, but said nothing.

“How are you keeping your cool?” Loki asked quietly. “All I can think about is barging in there and ripping all of those bastards limb from limb.”

“I had a limb ripped off once,” Bucky said tonelessly. “Not a pleasant experience.”

“Huh,” Loki said, looking up at the other man. “Did they let you keep it?”

“Keep... it?”

“The arm.”

“Why on Earth would I ever want to do that?”

Loki shrugged, and leaned up on his elbows. “You didn’t answer my question. How are you not

furious, and what's keeping you from rushing in there?"

"I am furious, though. And there is very little holding me back. But I trust in Stark—well, no, but I trust in Steve, and he trusts in Stark."

"Huh. I don't trust Anthony either. I don't trust Steve much—he seems like a stupid human version of a golden retriever," Loki said. Bucky shrugged, but didn't contradict him. "But I guess I can trust you, or try, at least."

"Why would you do that?" Bucky asked, unsettled.

"You're the only one who hasn't pledged loyalty to S.H.I.E.L.D. in some form, other than Peter and I. Which means that your loyalty right now is to Peter and no one else. And I respect that. And feel the same."

Bucky nodded seriously. No one on the team, other than Steve, had ever placed trust in him since his reprogramming. "I won't let you down."

"I know. Because then I'd have to kill you."

For the first time, Bucky gave Loki a small smile. "I would expect nothing less."

"Hey, Locks-of-Love," Tony said to the two anti-heroes, referring to their long hair. "Quit flirting and get your heads in the game."

Loki sat up fully and shook his head at Bucky. "If I were flirting, trust me, you'd know."

Steve and Thor, who'd luggered their supplies and weapons the three miles from the plane, were uploading the supplies and shaking out their muscles. Similarly, Bruce was doing an inventory check of their medical supplies.

Natasha and Clint were returning from opposite directions, and Tony's drones returned to him.

"Blind spot at the northwest corner of the fence, uncovered windows on the west side," Natasha said, grabbing a bottle of water from Steve's pack.

"Sync watches and put in your comms," Tony said. "We start at sundown."

The hours passed quick—and painfully slow. The Avengers ate high-density protein bars and drank electrolyte-infused energy drinks. Natasha sharpened knives and her widow's bites, and Loki sharpened his daggers as well. Clint obsessively strung and unstrung his bow. Thor, unexpectedly, fell asleep. Loki looked at his slumbering brother and shrugged—the god could fall asleep anywhere.

Tony was reviewing their plan, his genius brain going through every potential scenario, plotting for every potential problem. Steve and Bucky had their heads together, murmuring in low voices. From the look on Steve's face, he was trying to calm the other super soldier. They'd both been in failed rescue missions back in the war, and the situation was raising memories—bad memories.

Bruce was sitting on the ground, staring into the distance, chewing his nails nervously. Tony placed a hand over his, stilling the nervous movement. Bruce had clearly had too much caffeine, and his hands were jittery. Both men silently hoped that they wouldn't need any medical care that relied on steady hands.

"We head out in 10 minutes," Tony said softly, but all his teammates heard it clear through their

comms. “Suit up.”

Against Bruce’s advice, Tony peeled off the air case around his wrist. The Iron Man suit wouldn’t fit over the case, and both men just hoped that the suit’s rigidity would stabilize the wrist. Around him, all the other Avengers (minus Bruce) had equipped themselves, looking expectantly at Tony.

“Alright, Avengers. Let’s go rescue my boy.”

HYDRA Diss Track

“Today I don’t feel like doing anything. I just wanna lay in my bed. Don’t feel like picking up my phone, so leave a message at the tone, ‘cause today I swear I’m not doing anything,” Peter’s tone-deaf singing voice came from the cell. “I’m gonna kick my feet up and stare at the fan. Turn the TV on, throw my hand in my pants. Nobody’s goin’ tell me I can’t, no.”

“Shut up, and don’t touch yourself. You’ll pull the diodes off,” the HYDRA agent posted outside the cell grumbled at the singing teen.

“Coming out of my cage and I’ve been doing just fine. Gotta gotta be down, because I want it all.” Peter changed the song he was warbling.

“Why are you so annoying?”

“I’m beautiful in my way, ‘cause God makes no mistakes. I’m on the right track, baby, I was born this wa—ow.” A jolt of electricity shot up Peter’s neck, and he spasmed in extreme pain for several long seconds. Panting, he slurred out, “I can’t believe you’ve done this.” Another jolt through his neck forced him to lay on the ground writhing.

The agent grabbed a walkee-talkee. “Doc, may I—”

“I’m all out of faith, this is how I feel, I’m cold and I’m ashamed, bound and broken on the floor. You’re a little late, I’m already torn—”

A voice crackled through the speaker. “Just go ahead and gas him,” the man in charge’s voice said.

“Thank god,” the agent replied, hitting a switch next to the door. A translucent white cloud rolled through the cell—a high-potency gas specifically designed to override the teen’s quick metabolism. Peter’s eyes rolled into the back of his head and he stopped moving.

When the teenager came to, he was groggy, and noticed he was strapped to the chair again. “This is less than ideal,” he mumbled.

“Oh. My. God. Do you ever shut up?” one of the agents asked, before she backhanded him—hard. The split on his lip reopened, and he tasted blood.

“Don’t speak, I know what you’re saying—” A rag was stuffed in his mouth and he tunelessly hummed into it. Peter was loopy from the gas, and the room wouldn’t stop spinning.

Which is why he was sure he was hallucinating when another agent came forward to adjust his diodes, and the agent looked exactly like Natasha. She put a finger to her lips to indicate he should remain silent. Instead, he attempted to smile around the rag, and started humming Secret Agent

Man. Natasha rolled her eyes, fighting off a smile as she furtively loosened the straps around his hands and feet, under the guise of tightening them.

‘Get ready,’ she signed. ‘We’re getting you out of here.’

Peter nodded jerkily. With his loosely restrained hands, he attempted to sign back, ‘Can’t walk.’ The teenager was still seeing double—or was that triple?—and doubted he’d be able to stand. What was the sign for concussion? He debated fingerspelling it, but settled on saying, ‘head hurts.’

“Shit,” Natasha whispered. “We’re going to have to carry him out.” Peter wasn’t sure who she was talking to—one of the other Natashas standing in front of him, maybe—until he noticed the small comm in her ear.

With his enhanced hearing, Peter could pick out voices from the comm.

“We’re a bit held up with the outside guards. Better armed than expected.” That was Bucky’s voice. Peter assumed Steve was with him.

“How many freaking basement levels does this place have?” Clint asked. From the echo around him, Peter figured the archer was in the vent system.

“Four,” whispered Natasha. “We’re on the lowest level.”

“Main floor and first basement cleared, but I’m out. Suit’s fried,” Tony said.

“Second and third basements cleared, but Thor’s unconscious and I’m presumably bleeding out,” Loki said. “I won’t die—probably.”

“Damnit. Loki, take Thor and get your asses back to base,” Natasha whispered. “Bruce, you there? I think we might need the big guy.”

“You sure?” Peter could hear Bruce’s pained sigh across the comms. The scientist wasn’t a fan of the Hulk, didn’t like losing control. But for Peter, the man would do anything. “ETA two minutes.”

The teenager’s head lolled back. Focusing his hearing on the comms had overwhelmed his senses, and he was feeling even more dizzy than he had been.

“Stay with me, kid,” Natasha whispered. “We’re close.”

“Mmhmm,” he mouthed into the gag. “I ‘no.’

Another agent—a real agent—was striding towards them. Peter made a quick surveillance of the lab. Assuming all the other floors were cleared, there were still five agents and the man in charge left. The agents were all heavily armed, their guns and tasers standing out against their green and yellow uniforms. The agent, Peter recognized, was the one who had gassed him earlier. The teenager frantically shifted his eyes from Natasha to the agent, letting her know the man was nearing them. He had a suspicious look on his face, knowing the spy wasn’t with HYDRA, despite the lab coat she was wearing.

She sighed. “Clint, get your ass down here.”

A clanging from the metal vents above their heads was the only warning before the archer dropped from the ceiling. He rushed towards Natasha and the two of them stood back-to-back on either side

of Peter. She clapped her wrists together, turning on the spider bites, as Clint strung up three arrows. He shot three of the agents in the shoulder, and Natasha sent electrical pulses through the other two agents. But none of the agents stayed down for long—they were either enhanced or just powering through the pain.

As Clint was stringing up another arrow, a mighty roar came from the ceiling. The Hulk crashed through, landing on the man in charge and squishing him like a bug. Natasha raised an eyebrow—the mission was supposed to be non-fatal, taking all the HYDRA agents alive so S.H.I.E.L.D. could question them. But it didn't seem like the Hulk had exactly aimed for the man, so she shrugged. Hopefully S.H.I.E.L.D. could get enough intel from the man's computers.

The pause in the HYDRA agents' fighting as they watched their boss squashed was enough for Clint and Natasha to get the upper hand. She cranked the spider bites up to eleven and made direct contact with two of the agents' necks. The pulse was enough to send them sprawling to the floor, giving her time to secure their arms behind their backs with electrified zip ties. Clint sent arrows into the other agents' knees, effectively hobbling them, and tied their hands up as well. If he happened to dislocate one (or all three) of their shoulders while doing so, he didn't seem to mind.

Peter had gotten his hands and feet out of the chair, and was struggling to stand. The Hulk grabbed the teenager and picked him up like a small child, cradling Peter in his giant, green arms.

“Baby spider safe,” he ground out. “My baby.” He rocked the teenager back and forth before Natasha laid a hand on the Hulk’s arm.

“Hey, big guy. He’s a bit dizzy right now, so you might want to keep him still.”

The Hulk froze. “Hulk sorry.”

“I ‘no,’” Peter mumbled around the gag, having forgotten it was still in his mouth. With a shaky hand, he pulled it out and dropped it to the floor. “First I was afraid,” he warbled weakly, “I was petrified. Kept thinking I could never live without you by—” He lost consciousness again.

I'm Out of Pithy Titles

A monotonous beeping came through Peter’s dreams. He was falling, but somehow also missing a French quiz at the same time? Which was weird, because Peter wasn’t even taking French this semester—

The teenager peeled open his eyes. They were sticky, crusty. One of them felt swollen. He turned his head to see what the beeping was. A heart rate monitor. Must be connected to him.

Next to his bed sat Clint, spooning cheap hospital pudding into his mouth. Butterscotch most likely, from the color. Several empty containers were on the table next to him, making it clear that this wasn’t the archer’s first serving.

“Cl’nt,” Peter mumbled. “Where ‘m I?”

There was no response from the man. Just more pudding.

“Cl’nt. Hey, Cl’nt.” Peter waved a hand, trying to get the man’s attention.

“Oh crap, sorry,” Clint shouted, putting his pudding down. He reached up to fiddle with his ears, and then spoke at a reasonable volume. “Turned the hearing aids off, that beeping was getting annoying.”

“Where am I?” the teenager asked, slightly more coherently. He felt as if his head had been stuffed with cotton, and his face hurt.

“Avengers medical. You were pretty banged up when we got you. We were all so worried—oh jinkies, I’m supposed to let the others know when you’re awake. Hang on, kiddo.” Clint pressed a button on the wall. “Hey JARVIS,” he said into the ceiling. “Let them know my baby bird’s back.”

Seconds later, a voice cut through the room’s speakers. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“He’s awake, dum dum.” Clint flung his arms wide in a triumphant move, which was ruined when he knocked his pudding onto the floor. “Aw, pudding, no.”

“Then why didn’t you just say that? Be there in five.” Tony’s voice, Peter realized.

“Tony?”

“Yeah, kid, he’s coming.”

“Name’s Peter.”

“Yup, I know. The whole team knows, actually. And they know about the whole extra-curricular I-fight-bad-guys-after-school schtick too. Sorry.”

“Why sorry?” If Peter had been more with it, he would have freaked out about the Avengers knowing he was Spider-Man. But right now he didn’t have the mental capacity for that.

“Figured you’d want to come out of the closet on your own terms.” Clint wasn’t one of those superheroes who hid his face, but then again no one really cared who he was anyway.

“Out of the closet?” Peter’s eyes widened. “How did you all know? I’m not out to anyone except Ned and MJ.”

Clint choked. “I meant the Spider-Man closet, but okay. I think you’re still in that other closet, if you want to be.”

“Oh. Huh.”

“Yeah.”

They were interrupted by Tony striding into the room, followed by the entirety of the Avengers team. Between the beeping of the monitor, the number of people trying to talk to him, and the painful fluorescent lights of the room, Peter began to feel nauseous. He looked at Tony, pleading in his eyes.

“Alright, everyone out,” the man said. “JARVIS, lights at 50% please, and lower the volume of the monitor.”

Tony’s commands were followed immediately, though the Avengers looked tense. Clearly they wanted to make sure Peter was alright, and they looked mournfully at the limp teenager, who seemed smaller than ever hooked up to all those machines in that stark white hospital bed. Except for Clint, who looked mournfully at his pudding. They filtered out of the room and closed the door

behind them.

“I’m sorry—” Peter started, only to be stopped by Tony’s raised hand.

“No, I’m sorry. I brought you here to keep you safe. And I failed. That’s on me.”

“No, Tony—”

“Yes.”

“I lost my Hello Kitty watch. And my pajama pants,” he added, looking down at the hospital gown he was wearing.

“We saved the watch,” Tony said, exasperated. “The pants were a lost cause—too much blood.”

“Club soda and lemon juice,” Peter mumbled.

“I hate to think how you know that.”

“Not my first rodeo.” The teenager smiled up at Tony, eyes clear. “Hazards of the job.”

“It’s not a job if you don’t get paid.”

“Got paid in your friendship.”

“Oh. My. God. You absolute sap. I don’t even know why I keep you around. No, that’s a lie. You’re pretty much my favorite person in this nuthouse—and that’s including Pepper, though don’t you dare tell her.”

“Your secret’s safe with me.” Peter’s eyes were suspiciously wet, though neither of them deigned to mention it.

“They’ll be keeping you in medical for a few more days, but when you’re better you can move into your room.”

“Back with you and Pepper?”

“Uh, actually,” Tony said, turning a bit pink. “I already kinda built you a bedroom off of your lab. Remember the red door? And there’s a suite for May if she wants, close to Happy’s floor. I wasn’t going to pressure you or anything, but I figured—”

Peter struggled to get up, wanting—needing—to hug Tony. “Mr. Stark—”

“Nope, it’s Tony, or else no hug.”

“Tony.” Peter pouted, holding his arms wide. “Now.”

The engineer let out a melodramatic sigh, though both of them could tell there was a happy smirk behind it.

Flash’s Redemption Arc

[ChairGuy]

I can't believe this is the day u chose to come back
WTF is wrong w u

[TheKid]
Why yes, I missed u too
I'm doing fine, thanks for asking

[ChairGuy]
Oh ha ha

[TheKid]
spiderman-bloopers.gif
See you soon bruh

The elevator door opened on the communal floor and Peter stepped out, slipping his phone into his pants pocket. He'd quickly acclimated to his new room off of the lab, but he still came up to the Avengers' common kitchen for breakfast every morning. After all, he'd spent ten years having before-school breakfast with his Aunt May; he wasn't going to let their new living situation change that.

Of course, the Avengers all knew that this was his first day back at school, and they'd all showed up to see him off. Even Clint, who was never up that early, was standing dazed in the kitchen, chugging coffee directly from the piping-hot pot.

“Is this really necessary?” Peter asked, shoveling Lucky Charms into his mouth. Of course, with his mouth full of the sugary cereal, it sounded more like ‘is is illy gness’ry?’

“No,” Tony said, glaring at the assembled Avengers.

“Yes,” Loki said, glaring back. He turned to Peter. “Very necessary.”

Peter rolled his eyes, but accepted the various ‘good lucks’ and ‘behaves’ the Avengers gave him as he finished his breakfast. He accepted a hug from his Aunt May—who was standing pleasantly close to Happy, Peter was pleased to notice—and then headed down to the lobby.

Between his super-hearing and spidey-senses, he knew at least two of the Avengers were following him on his walk to school. He'd also already located the bug in his backpack but decided to let them listen in, at least for a few days, before removing it.

“Kid!” Ned squealed as Peter reached the sidewalk in front of Midtown. He grabbed Peter into a giant bear hug.

“You can call me Peter now,” the other teen chuckled, hugging back. They separated reluctantly and immediately launched into their secret handshake.

MJ had been behind Ned, slouching as normal and rocking back on her heels. She came towards Peter—was she actually going to hug him? What was going on?—and extended her hand for a fist bump, which Peter happily gave her.

“Missed you, loser.”

“You too, MJ.”

“Can’t believe you decided to come back for midterms.”

“What can I say? I’m a glutton for punishment.”

Ned rolled his eyes at his friends. “Come on, you dorks. History waits for no man.”

It didn’t matter whether history waited, since the trio made it to their 20th century U.S. history class on time. Peter felt ready for the exam—after all, Steve and Bucky had helped him study World War II, and Tony had chipped in on the war in Afghanistan.

After the teens had all turned in their tests, Peter waved goodbye to Ned and MJ as they rushed off to their Spanish class. Peter had a free period next, so he didn’t rush packing up his bag. He was shoving his pens into his backpack when he sensed someone slide into the desk next to his. Looking up, he was surprised to see Flash sitting next to him, looking sheepish.

“Hey, kid, can we talk?” the other teen said, turning pink and looking at his own feet.

“It’s Peter. What do you want, Eugene?” Peter sighed. He’d figured that he’d have to talk to Flash at some point, especially after the other teen’s debriefing from the ruined field trip.

“I’m sorry.”

“What?”

“I said, I’m sorry. I’ve been—well, I’m a dick. Though you kind of knew that already.”

“What?” Peter repeated, confused.

“It’s not—I’m not just saying this because, y’know.” Flash looked up at the other teen and let out a small, wry smile.

“Ider-spay an-may?” Peter smirked back.

“Yeah. I mean, that’s super cool. But I—that’s not why. And it’s not just ‘cause I’m pretty sure the Black Widow could kill me and they’d never find the body. But I’m a jerk. And, like, whoa. They really—the Avengers really care about you. Like family.”

“They do. But I’m pretty sure they won’t kill y—”

“Not what I meant.” Flash let out a small self-deprecating chuckle. “I mean, that’s what family’s supposed to be like. And I—I’m jealous, y’know? That’s not something I’ve ever had. And it made me realize that I’m probably pretty screwed up in terms of how I treat people. And I’m trying to be better. So I figured I should probably apologize.” Several awkward moments of silence passed as Flash fidgeted. “So yeah, you don’t have to accept or anything. I just wanted to—”

“Thank you, Eugene,” Peter said softly. “I’m not—we’re not going to be friends, at least not yet. But I really appreciate that. And if—if you ever want to talk about it, I’m here. Trust me, I know enough about messed up family situations. And obviously a good listener, given the super-hearing and whatnot.”

“Thanks, Peter,” Flash said wetly. He swept a hand across his face—when had he started crying? “I’ll see you later.” The bully—former bully?—stood up and slung his backpack over one shoulder. “I’ve got some other people to apologize to.”

Peter watched the other boy leave the room before putting his own backpack on and heading out into the hallway. Okay, he thought wryly. At least one good thing had come out of the mess of a field trip. Smiling softly to himself, he walked towards the library, hoping to get some additional

studying in before his chemistry exam.

Chapter End Notes

Yep, that's the end. As far as I know, Peter aced his midterms (except for English lit, which he got an 89% in). He went home to the Avengers, and they all went out for shwarma to celebrate Peter's first day back at school.

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